



虎虎 Torako
Illustration 逢坂望美



恋がしたい！ でも 中二病

4

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中二病でも恋がしたい!

映画 中二病でも恋がしたい!
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邪王真眼、再降臨

Torako

The final volume!

Translation: Jonhons



“Huh!? Are you feeling okay!?”
Former chuunibyou patient
Togashi Yuuta

元・中二病 富樫 勇太
とがし ゆうた

「え!? 大丈夫なのか!」



“Don’t be surprised, okay...? When I got up this morning,
the Devilish Truth Stare had disappeared.” The person who
had become an ordinary girl – Takanashi Rikka

普通になった少女 小鳥遊 六花
たかなし りつか

「なくなってたの」

「驚かないでね……?」
朝起きたら邪王真眼が



私にも、まだチャンスは
あるかもしれないんだ★

魔法魔王少女 七宮 智音

it means that I may still have a chance★.”
Magical Demon Duchess Shichimiya Satone



「悪いね。六花ちゃん――」

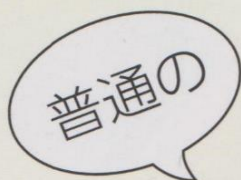
“Sorry about all this. You see, Rikka-chan –



中二病 でも 恋がしたい!

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Exchange Diary: To Yuuta

Friday, 3rd June.

Today is exactly half a year since I first started this exchange diary with Yuuta...!

Although half a year is usually considered a long period of time, half a year felt like an instant for me!

But that instant – all sorts of things had happened in this half-year.

I've have had a lot of experiences this past half-year.

That too was thanks to the help of "everyone".

Right, I hadn't informed Yuuta yet, but just the other day I had gone to play with Arc-san. It was the first time that it was just the two of us playing together.

"It seems with the exception of us, DevTru Rikka-chan goes and plays with everyone quite often. Although a neglect play also feels special, surely the two of us will play together, just the two of us, soon!"

So said Arc-san as she threatened me.

The heck was she saying, this person... Despite thinking that, I had fun when we played together. The horrifying results of needing to adhere to "Let's do something not normal!" – the rest is a bit confidential.

By the way, although this is completely unrelated: Yuuta, what's with you calling Arc-san "Hideri-senpai" all of a sudden?

As for Siesta-senpai, she frequently sorties into Makyous¹.

¹ Makyou (魔境) is a term in Zen Buddhism which refers to the hallucinations that may arise during intensive meditation which lead the meditator away from enlightenment.

Although Siesta-senpai always uses her powers to sleep whenever there is the chance, Makyous cause her to cry out “Godlike~!²” every single time.

She doesn’t sleep at all... Amazing!

As ever with Sofia – we keep exchanging victories and defeats!

Since losing to her that one time in a “cooking battle”, I’ve challenged her many times over with the cuisine passed down to me by Yuuta, but to this very day I’ve still yet to win a cooking battle... Instruct me again...!

While that was happening, my contract with Dekomori had become stronger – there is no barrier that cannot be crossed!

Still, Yuuta should try to be a bit friendlier with Dekomori. Both of you are fellow comrades in terms of having exchanged contracts with the Devilish Truth Stare. That might be why there is conflict between the two of you though... Since I don’t think that conflict between you two is a good thing, I wish for Yuuta to also obtain a suitable contract with Dekomori.

Speaking of things that happened a little while ago: I was not able to show Yuuta, but Mori-sama and her people had enchanted my nails.

Although Mori-sama got mad at me and said, “No, don’t call it something like enchanting your nails!”... It was clearly an enchantment – among other things I had a cross added! Since it was the first time I had have my nails enchanted, I had a great experience! Next time, if I get my nails enchanted again, I’ll make sure to also show Yuuta!

Also, I have an important notice; or rather, an important report.

Finally. Finally – my first win in a game against Fuurin³!

...But, she got her revenge immediately after...

² The word 神ってる, loosely translated here as “Godlike”, is a buzzword that was the winner of the 2016 U-Can Shingo Ryukogo Taisho (or U-Can New Words and Buzzwords Awards). This phrase gained its fame after the team manager of the Hiroshima Toyo Carp, Ogata Koichi, described the performance of one of his players, Suzuki Seiya, with said phrase after his game winning performance which involved hitting a walk-off home run for the second straight day.

³ Referring to Fuurin Kannagi. While the fuurigana for Fuurin’s name (風鈴) has been read as Fuurin (かざり) in the past 3 volumes, in volume 4 the accompanying fuurigana is now ふうりん

With the above feelings in mind, it made me think that “everyone” contributed greatly to the variety of experiences that I have had.

But, the person I owe the most for this half-year is Yuuta!

Since it’s so fun being with Yuuta, it feels like time passes before I know it. “Perhaps this is Yuuta’s new ability!?” is something I think quite often. I think quite often of it so often, it would not be an exaggeration to say that I think of it all the time!

If Yuuta truly has awakened such an ability, please report about it to me.

Also, it’s really fun writing this exchange diary!

The things I didn’t get the chance to say in the day, or things I wasn’t able to say, I can write all about it here.

It makes me feel that Yuuta is by my side at all times. Not only can I report various things to Yuuta, but it’s also super fun being able to read Yuuta’s diary entries!

Although Yuuta’s entries are serious, when I read them I often think “Ah, how amazingly Yuuta-like!”. As expected of the Dark Flame Master, the things you think about give off a dark feeling.

What about Yuuta?

I know it’s a bit late, but this exchange diary that began as a result of my request, it isn’t an annoyance to Yuuta, is it?

To be honest, my heart pounds at the thought of being told the words “Let’s stop”...

Thank you for not saying those words.

Thank you for going out with me.

I’m extremely blessed!

From this half-year mark, I hope that I’m able to continue having all sorts of different experiences. To tell the truth, experiencing anything for the first time is good with Yuuta. From here on out too, I want to experience a lot of different things together with Yuuta!

Yuuta, I’ll forever love you!

Prologue: Moved on from Chuunibyou!?

Let me make one last confession.

I, Togashi Yuuta, am moving on from chuunibyou. I am definitely moving on from it. To tell the truth, it was only recently that I realised that I was moving on from chuunibyou so definitively.

Back when I enrolled into high school too, I had thought, “I have already moved on from chuunibyou!” Or more precisely, I believe I had made a confession along those lines.

Getting a fresh start, making my high school debut – I hadn’t planned on doing such things at all, but since I, for some reason, became excessively embarrassed about my behaviour up until then, the me of back then made changes to how I was. Or I guess I should say that I established a new me.

I changed the way I referred to myself from “boku” to “ore” (although when I was in chuuni-mode, I used “ore”) and made my hair colour a little lighter. I discarded thoughts like black is supreme. There were lots of other changes like that, but since they were so numerous I’ll omit listing them all. And so, like that, the “new Togashi Yuuta” organically completed.

With no history, a past-less Togashi Yuuta.

And with that, I had moved on – or so I thought, but it seems that was wrong.

Thinking back on it now.

While on the surface it had appeared that I had moved on, on the inside, I hadn’t been able to move on mentally at all. I had merely made a “new self” and did no more than keep my “past self” at a distance. I was simply trying to forget how I was in the past. Who I was back then – I wasn’t able to accept it.

That – being unable to accept who I was – was undoubtedly “chuunibyou”.

Nonetheless, it was because I hadn’t been able to move on that I was able to meet Rikka, reunite with Shichimiya, and get along with my upperclassmen. As such, I was glad that I hadn’t been able to move on.

As a result, I was able to meet everyone, allowing me to become able to move on from chuunibyou.

Although it's a little off-topic, these days I've gradually realised that "to accept my chuunibyou self" is what moving on from chuunibyou means. My encounter with Amaniji Hideri-senpai played a large part in me realising this.

Throughout heaven and earth, I alone am the honoured one⁴ – now that I mention it, it could very well be interpreted as something bad when it's described like that, but even so, when I see Hideri-senpai's unique human nature, oh wow, it puts my narrow concept of the self into perspective. Hideri-senpai has had an extremely varied past: the acquisition of her unique human nature was due to said past. Although it definitely is strange for me to be comparing the two, but the past I carried could not compare to hers at all.

The past I had was nothing more than "longing, envy, and imitation".

However, as for Hideri-senpai's "must be special" past, not only was her past much harsher than mine, but her past was also heavily influenced by the complex environment she had been raised in. As such, it was only natural that I couldn't compare her resulting "chuunibyou" with mine.

But, that past: Hideri-senpai was not bitter about it.

To be neither be ashamed of it in the past, nor be ashamed of it now: that style of dealing with the past.

To be honest, it astounded me.

Predictably, it wasn't something on that should be aspiring to do, and yet those things that I was unable to do, Hideri-senpai's deeds – now that I mention it, while it does once again sound like it's referring to something bad (why is it that "bad" is the first thing that comes to mind?), calling it her deeds was indeed the best way to describe it.

Well, since it was impossible to say that the way Hideri-senpai deals with her past wasn't astonishing, there probably wasn't anyone who viewed Hideri-senpai as a person worthy of admiration. And yet I admired her.

As for why?

When Hideri-senpai talked to me about herself, I had been able to reflect on my own past a little.

⁴ Translation of the phrase 天上天下唯我独尊, which was supposedly recited by Buddha at time of his birth while raising his right arm.

The me of back then, it was just adolescence: it was no more than just wanting to be like the people before my eyes. For me to be ashamed of that – impossible. That is what I have come to think.

After having come to think of things in that way, I became able to view my past self with respect.

It was thanks to my past self that my present self existed, after all.

That's why, it was only recently that the "newly created Togashi Yuuta" felt like the proper Togashi Yuuta.

To accept the chuunibyou self.

In that sense, it would mean that the person that I admired a long time ago had moved on from chuunibyou, and so I asked her honestly about it.

The result,

"What an idiotic question. An idiotic question among idiotic questions, more idiotic than the question that was asked back when Hero and I continued where we left off after a long time, an extremely idiotic question. To move on does not mean to end – it merely means to proceed. That's why, a person moving on from something – completely contrary to what Hero is saying, it does not mean things are ending. It means to proceed and to advance to the next phase – let's try saying it in a more charming manner. That's why, Hero, it should be thought of as an 'evolution'. Yeah, it's like how I had changed from being the Demon Duchess to being the Magical Demon Duchess☆. In Hero's case, I guess that you'd be the Hero King next?"

Accompanied by a "nyahaha", she smiled as she responded to me in that manner.

As usual, the person that I admired was super cool.

Well.

I don't think I could become the Hero King though.

And so, with feelings like this in mind I moved on – although what that person called "evolution" did appeal to me.

Me, I'm really moving on.

That's why, the thing that I'm currently doing is not related to chuunibyou at all. It's completely unrelated!



"Now that I've been awakened by a wave of murderous intent, no one can stop me! Haa!"

In order for me to unleash that power, although there was no real purpose behind it, I opened up the chest area of my outfit. And then, likewise without having any real purpose for doing so, I laughed "hahaha". Because I thought that it'd be cool.

As for the enemies in front of me, in response to my sudden act of barbarity, they suddenly groaned, "You...!"

Heh heh heh... No mistaking it, they are feeling overwhelmed by my powers of darkness... Now to attack.

"Sever the skies – eat this!"

First Absolute Sword Sound of Water's Path
Raising "Shizetsuken – Reirin", I literally slashed at the sky. Needless to say, it was an aimless swing. Naturally, I had taken safety into account as I swung my sword. It was a bit of a strange thing to say, however, that I was taking into account the safety of my enemies.

But, it was effective. Effective to my enemies – to Rikka and Yumeha.

"Urgaaaaaah!" the two of them yelled, as if they would die at any moment.

It was tremendously effective.

Having received some mysterious damage, Rikka and Yumeha panted "Ha, ha" heavily. Then, as if they were in pain, the two of them raised their eyes to look up at my face. Although they weren't sisters, the two of them were in sync as if they were.

"As expected of Yuuta..."

"As expected of Onii-chan..."

I was praised by the two of them.

Although this was, in various ways, not a praise-worthy situation, as Yumeha had stopped praising me recently, as an older brother this was a happy miscalculation. And there was still Rikka praising me too to consider.

Praise me more!

Since I had nailed looking cool, I was getting swept up by the mood.

“Hmph. Are you going to surrender now?”

“And if I don’t surrender...?”

Was what Rikka replied with to my query.

She answered as if to protect my sister, who was still on her knees due to that mysterious damage. It was also cool that she had nailed inverting what I had just said back to me. I then continued on with my catchphrase.

“Be engulfed in the flames of darkness!”

“...Damn, if this goes on – Yumeha...!”

Plopping her hand on Yumeha’s head, it appeared that somehow or other, Rikka was transferring over her energy. However, just because it appears that way doesn’t mean that was actually the case!

Still, it would be troubling to me if I let her do as she pleased and allowed her to do stuff like share her energy. In a situation like this, Rikka’s stock with Yumeha would go up, wouldn’t it? I do want for Yumeha to be praising me some more, after all.

“Know your place!”

I once again slashed Rikka with “Shizetsuken – Rein” (I didn’t actually cut her. I’m against violence!).

“Gyaaaaah!”

Once again receiving mysterious damage, Rikka collapsed on the spot.

With Rikka in such a state, Yumeha anxiously approached Rikka, seemingly in a panic.

“Ri-Rikka-chan!? O-Onii-chan...! Onii-chan!”

My sister looked at me with eyes full of contempt.

Her eyes of contempt made me take heavy damage in unexpected places. I thought that she would switch sides and praise me with something like, “You were able to do something like that even to Rikka-chan. Onii-chan’s the best after all! I love you!”

Nonetheless, it was bearable... After all, I’ve already experienced my sister gazing at me with eyes full of contempt many times before in the past!

“Are you okay Rikka-chan!?”

So that she could check the fallen Rikka’s current status, Yumeha shook Rikka’s body. She shook Rikka with an excessive amount of force.

Yumeha’s childlike lack of restraint in shaking Rikka made me worried.

Are you actually okay...? Rikka...?

“I-I’m fine...! Steady yourself, Yumeha...! If we lose, the earth – no, the universe will end!”

“.....”

It was a grandiose story.

I didn’t have any plans to do something like ruling over the universe, however. Rather, I just wanted for my little sister who hadn’t been praising me at all recently to praise me a little. To me, that was more important than ruling the universe.

“B-but...” Yumeha whimpered.

However, Rikka commanded Yumeha with the continuation of her words.

“Now it is time to activate the legendary power.”

“L-legendary power?”

“That’s right. The power that I’ve also entrusted to Yumeha – the golden light.”

“The legendary power – the golden light.”

“If it’s Yumeha and I, if it’s us two, we should be able to activate the legendary power.”

“If it’s Yumeha and Rikka-chan...”

“That’s right. That’s why... The two of us are going to defeat Yuuta.”

“...Yup!”

Since it appeared that the two of them had forgotten my existence and gone off into their own little world, there hadn’t been a way for me to jump into the conversation at all. Now, however, it appeared that I was finally able to join in.

“Mwahaha... If that’s true, then that legendary power – show it to me.”

I delivered that really cool villain-like line without a hitch.

My past experiences had come into good use.

“Yuuta – it looks like you cannot suppress the rampaging darkness. But, it’ll be fine. We’ll free you,” said Rikka as she grasped Yumeha’s hand.

In return, Yumeha also grasped Rikka’s hand and said, “Onii-chan. Yumeha’s going to save you.”

Is that so – me, be saved? That, is my long-cherished dream.

“Yumeha! Active the legendary power. With our powers combined we’ll attack in unison!”

“Mm! Understand! With the powers of the two of us combined – shine!”

“The Devilish Truth Stare of Miracles’ power!”

And with those lines, the two of them pointed the hands they had grasped together in my direction.

““Dual Birthday Beam!!!””

The hands that the two of them had pointed at me glowed (seriously, that’s what I saw) and fired off a special move that without a doubt was the legendary power (seriously, that’s what I thought).

That attack purified me.

That was clear. I could feel it.

I wonder if this was what being saved from the darkness feels like – surely, many enemy characters had felt this before, this sensation that I didn't really need to know, this pleasant sensation that I had just experienced for the first time.

And thus, I said my final line.

Naturally, it was a cool line.

“This isssssss – the power of legendddddddddd... ahhh...”

This time, it was my turn to collapse on the spot.

And speaking of things that went in accordance with what was expected, in accordance with what was expected – things happened as per convention.

Thus, the peace of the earth – no, the peace of universe was protected.



“Yay! It's Onii-chan's loss! What a small fry!”

In a first-year elementary school student way, Yumeha, who was cackling as she smiled in joy and delight, had calmly used disparaging words to describe her older brother.

While it did make me feel that I had to pay close attention to Yumeha's choice of words, as I convinced myself that children these days use all sorts of words and will, at times, use words that are trendy as they grow up, I put up with that mischief of hers.

It seemed that the word “small fry” had also become popular in Yumeha's surroundings. If that's the case, then I guess it couldn't be helped that she'd say those words.

Then again.

As long as Yumeha had fun, it was whatever.

Besides, Rikka had also enjoyed herself.

“That's right. Today's Yuuta was a small fry. A small fry character.”

“So a small fry character was planning on ruling the universe, huh...?”

What a detestable enemy character.

I wished that my character could be a little more grand already. Maybe that was why my youngest sister doesn't praise me. And I don't seem to recall hearing much from the mouth of my other little sister, Kuzuha, much at all recently either.

I wonder if it was because she was going through puberty that Kuzuha didn't come to me for anything...

In this world, the little sister that you see in anime that is amazingly sweet to and soft on her older brother doesn't exist.

"Mm! Yumeha's a little weary! Yumeha's going to go drink some juice!"

Out of the blue, Yumeha suddenly sprang up and began talking. And, without giving me the time to say something like, "Ah, could you also get some for Rikka and I –", she quickly dashed out of my room.

My sister as freewheeling as usual.

At the same time that it had become just the two of us in my room, my eyes met perfectly with Rikka's.

"Um."

My voice got strangely jammed.

The mysterious phenomenon, where for some reason it becomes awkward when it suddenly becomes just two people, was here.

In such an atmosphere,

"Yuuta, what I said just a little while ago was a lie. Rest assured, True Yuuta is next in terms of power to the Devilish Truth Stare."

Rikka suddenly gave me a thumb up and shattered said atmosphere.

Although it was a mysterious follow-up, I'm extremely grateful for that kindness of hers that not only was properly accommodating of Yumeha, but also earnestly considerate of me – in short, it was the "Why I love Rikka!" parts of her.

For her to have also shrewdly positioned herself as the strongest: it truly was the usual Rikka.

“By the way, why doesn’t Yuuta become the Dark Flame Master? If you did, I don’t think that Yumeha will treat you as a small fry, so why...?”

As she said that, Rikka tilted her head cutely.

Hmm.

I became a little troubled – now that she mentions it, when Yumeha asks me to play make-believe with her, I do seal away the Dark Flame Master. Well, it was a bit of a half-baked seal, however, since my catchphrase had remained unchanged.

Sometimes I had used the setting that I had been awakened thanks to a wave of murderous intent, other times I used the setting that I had embraced the darkness – anyway, the point is that I must not have used the Dark Flame Master setting yet.

Mmm.

I hadn’t been particularly conscious of it, but I’m guessing this was probably why I didn’t use the Dark Flame Master setting.

“The Dark Flame Master is currently sealed. Besides, the Dark Flame Master is a hero – I think?”

“Ah. I see.”

Rikka appeared to be extremely convinced.

Since it wasn’t something that I myself had been aware of when I chose not to use the Dark Flame Master setting, I had no confidence in my response, but if it convinced Rikka, then I guess it was likely to be correct.

Among the Yuutas, the Dark Flame Master is the “hero me”.

Yep. That is why it cannot be used when I am playing the villain.

Since Rikka had asked me something, I’ll also ask her about something that has been on my mind for a while.

“You know, I also have something that I’m curious about: you’ve recently taken a liking to combination attacks, haven’t you?”

Indeed.

These days, whenever Rikka comes over and plays something like this with Yumeha (to tell the truth, this make-believe scenario is done quite often. Recently, when we play house, it ends up being something like this), it generally ends with a combination attack.

Previously, combination attacks never happened: it either ended with Yumeha killing me with her favourite special move that she picked up from an anime, or Rikka using a new skill of the Devilish Truth Stare to seal me away.

Now, however, it ends with a unique combination attack.

Regardless, I still end up dead...

"The combination skill with Yumeha is proof of our deepened bond. Moreover, cooperation is powerful!"

Rikka replied immediately. An earnest, immediate reply.

I nodded in understanding.

"That certainly is the case, isn't it? Working together is indeed a surefire method of attaining victory."

"Does Yuuta want to become one with me too?"

"Er, ah –"

I was, for an instant, completely stumped, and hesitated in my answer.

Hm? The combination skill with me, what it would be, that was what I was pondering – at that moment.

"No! Rikka-chan can only become one with Yumeha!"

Had she been listening in to our conversation partway through? Either way, Yumeha opened my door to my room with an earth-shattering force and forced her way into the conversation.

That's my freewheeling sister. She was completely different from how she was a few minutes ago – she was seriously fuming mad.

"Now, now," I said to Yumeha in an attempt to pacify her.

However, as Yumeha refused to calm down, it seemed that there was no choice but to accede to her demand.

“Ahaha, so it was no good after all.”

“Seems that way,” agreed Rikka with a small nod.

I got the feeling that she had only said a little of what she wanted to say, however. I’m guessing that she stayed silent since Yumeha was nearby. As Rikka was also the youngest child in her family, it may have been the case that she understood how Yumeha was feeling.

“You can’t, Onii-chan! Yumeha has the Devilish Truth Stare Another Type! Onii-chan doesn’t have that, right?”

“...Yes, I do not have it.”

“That’s why you can’t! UNDERSTAND?”

“...Yes.”

My sister told me off.

...Still, to experience Yumeha’s growth as a person! That’s right, to experience my little sister telling me off is to experience her growth as a person, isn’t it! If that’s the case, then I’m fine with her scolding me more!

“Onii-chan, why do you look so happy? Well whatever! Rikka-chan Rikka-chan! Rikka-chan too has her birthday coming up soon right? Yumeha has something good for your present!”

Ignoring my desire for her to fervently reprimand me (which made me really sad), Yumeha frolicked with Rikka.

She truly acted as she pleased.

Incidentally, since she was holding something in her hand, it appeared that she had, for some reason, gone to the living room just now.

On that note, regarding that thing about Rikka-chan “too”: as a matter of fact, it was Yumeha’s birthday yesterday. She was now 7-years-old. The realisation that she was now an elementary school first grader – regrettably, she did not have that yet. It’s a bit late for me to be commenting on it now, but this was likely why their combination skill was “Dual Birthday Beam”.

Rikka's birthday was also coming up soon.

Today was the day we celebrated Yumeha's birthday, and so along with Rikka, the three of us played together – but then again, since the three of us playing together was an everyday occurrence, I guess you could say that this was just the usual scene. What was different from usual, however, was that Rikka had appeared to have given some mysterious present to Yumeha before we had started to play.

...Even though that too was also something that occurred quite frequently.

And like that, Yumeha, who could be called the star of today's birthday party, acted in a way befitting of the star of a birthday party and did as she pleased. It appeared that she frolicked with Rikka by drawing something on her.

Looking at it closely – she drew this rather dubious image on Rikka's arm. With a permanent marker. A thick one.

Rather, Rikka: are you fine with this!?

It looked like it was something that wouldn't disappear for quite some time, but... Judging from her lack of resistance to being drawn on, it seemed that she didn't have a problem with it.

"Proof of contract! This is the contract with Yumeha contract! With this Rikka-chan too, Yumeha's power, she can use it."

Apparently, it seemed that she was trying to imitate the proof of contract that had used to be drawn on the back of my hand.

According to Rikka, "By now the coat of arms has already entered Yuuta's body. If Yuuta wills it, it is possible for it to resurface," and so I did not have the proof of our contract currently drawn on my hand. Still, it felt somewhat nostalgic.

Knowing that Yumeha was also envious of it made me quite pleased.

As I got caught up by strong emotions like that by myself, all of a sudden Yumeha called out to me.

"Hey, does Onii-chan want to draw a proof of contract too? Onii-chan is also Rikka-chan's contractee, right?"

"Huh...?"

No no, that's a bit, you know...

As expected, it's a bit awkward to scrawl something on a girl's arm. Not to mention that it'll be done with a permanent marker. And a thick one at that.

I peeped at Rikka's face to see what I should do – "Go for it!" was the sort of face she made.

Seriously?

Since Yumeha also seemed like she wouldn't take no for an answer... Guess I have no choice.

"I guess..."

With that reasoning in mind, I was given the pen from Yumeha and nervously drew an ㊦ on Rikka's arm as a poor excuse as the 'proof'. If it was just this, then I guess it was okay. Compared to Yumeha's very thick enigmatic coat of arms, mine probably was not that big of a deal.

I get the impression that something like that wasn't what the troubling part about all this was, however.

My only saving grace was that Rikka didn't seem to mind it at all.

"Ooh. The proof from Yuuta. I'm glad!"

In fact, she looked rather pleased by it.

Thank goodness... right...?

"Eh!? What about Yumeha's!?"

"Of course, Yumeha's also made me happy. Thank you, Yumeha. With this, my contract with Yumeha has also become even stronger!"

"Ooh! Yay! Yumeha will, for sure, become even stronger than Rikka-chan!"

"Mm. Yumeha will without a doubt become even stronger than me. That's why I also have a gift for you."

Saying that, Rikka received a superfine pen from Yumeha (if you had that pen on you all along, then I wished that, instead of the thick pen, you could have given me that superfine pen to me as well) and drew a superb complex coat of arms on the back of Yumeha's hand.

As expected of someone of her abilities, I guess you could say. Since she was so skilled at it, she completed the coat of arms in a blink of an eye.

“Wow! Amazing amazing! It’s great isn’t it, Onii-chan!”

“...Hah, you know, my coat of arms has already been taken into my body. Yumeha, it seems that your coat of arms is still visible.”

“Eh!? That’s unfair! Fine! Yumeha will have double the amount of coat of arms! Rikka-chan, draw it here as well!”

“D’accord. Intent is understood.”

Rikka seemed happy to comply with the Yumeha’s wishes. Coat of arms that were even more complex than the one that was drawn just some time ago were steadily getting drawn. I too couldn’t take my eyes off it. Amazing, Rikka.

While we did things like that together, it became almost 6 p.m before I knew it.

Our enjoyable time together passed in a blink of an eye. To tell the truth, I had a “woah, since when!?” sort of feeling.

It was almost time for me to start preparations for dinner.

Since Rikka was such a big help today, it also doubled as thanks,

“It’s about time for me to start preparations for dinner. Rikka, would you like to eat dinner together with us?”

inviting her to dinner.

We had a deserter today (Kuzuha) so the amount of food that I would have needed to make would be the same as usual. And since, as per usual, our father and mother were late in returning home, I judged that it would be a bit lonesome if it were just me and Yumeha eating.

“Eh? Is that okay?”

Pausing her work for a moment, Rikka thoroughly stared in my direction as she responded in a lively voice.

It was a mystery as to why she stared at me so thoroughly, but yes, of course it is.

In fact, I warmly welcome you.

Someone needed to eat the portion of the person who decided not to eat my food and instead go out to eat together with her friends (in other words, Kuzuha). Or rather, it would be rather difficult to invite you if Kuzuha was here.

For some reason, Kuzuha openly sulks when Rikka is here.

A sister going through puberty was difficult to deal with.

“Yumeha’s stomach is empty too! Rikka-chan, these days, Onii-chan’s become amazing as a result of his ‘training’!”

Heh heh, commented Yumeha as she, for some reason, puffed her chest out in pride – still, as far as I was concerned, those words of hers made me happy. Yumeha, keep boasting please! And, praise your brother some more!

Well, all jokes aside.

It was as Yumeha says.

Even I felt that my cooking ability had improved by a bit.

The result of my training – I used last year’s winter vacation and this year’s spring break to work part-time for the first time of my life.

And, as to where I worked part-time – it was at a shop owned by Rikka’s older sister. It was roughly half a year ago that I became acquainted with her: it was thanks to that connection that she managed to rope me in to working at her shop. And, it was at that time, that I was taught the secrets of cooking.

“I’ll kill you if you make an unsavoury dish.” As Rikka’s sister worked me to the bone using fear, it could be said that it was natural that I had levelled up.

Although there were several times where I had almost been killed by cooking utensils (she was a frightening person who, for some incomprehensible reason, carried around cooking utensils to use for the sake of discipline!), by now it had become a lovely memory. Thank goodness that I was able to return home alive!

...Seriously though, she was a really nice person. I was very indebted to her. Even now we were on good terms: we still get in touch from time to time. Although it could also be said that she was simply monitoring me.

“I see. In that case, I’ll be taking advantage of your kind offer.”

“Alright, then I’ll be making something that you’ve previously stated to be one of your favourites, tortilla!”

“Ooh! I’m looking forward to it!”

Rikka looked very happy as she smiled.

Of course, I too was happy.

I was happy to the point where it made me wish that this time of ours together could last forever.



After we had finished dinner and rested for a bit, Yumeha, who appeared to have not had her fill of playing around yet, made a fuss by saying, “No, no! Rikka-chan’s staying!” and threw a tantrum (she says this every time). To appease her, Rikka told Yumeha, “Yumeha, we have a Heavenly Connection in this world. Don’t worry, I’ll come again soon,” (Rikka also plays along every time). With Yumeha placated, Rikka and I left my house.

Since the day was coming to an end, I had to see Rikka off properly.

Since this neighbourhood was more or less an urbanised area, there were a lot of street lights, and so it wasn’t that dark. Still, as there were a lot of scary incidents as of late, I absolutely had to walk her home. While Rikka’s apartment wasn’t that far away from my house, in today’s society there was no knowing what dangers could be lurking around at night.

Seriously, be careful, everyone.

Moreover.

Although it would just be for a short while, I really love taking leisurely walks with someone else.

Oh, and I’ve stopped the practice of having two people on the same bike. It’s against the law, so stop riding together, everyone! Challenging the power of the state – given that I’ve moved on from that sort of thing, I don’t do things like that anymore.

“Today too, you had to play with Yumeha. It’s all you’ve been doing when you come over these days: you’re not annoyed by it, are you?”

“Mm. It’s not a problem. I also find it fun playing together with Yumeha. It’s like I’ve gotten a little sister.”

"I see. To hear you say that makes me quite glad as well."

"...It's just..."

"Hm?"

"Since Yuuta had been training this whole time... Um... once in a while... maybe it would be good if it could be just the two of us... or something..."

"Eh!?"

I never would have expected for Rikka to be thinking of something like that. It dumbfounded me.

Well, of course I too agree with the sentiment of "wanting for a lot of 'just the two of us' time", but this seemed to be the first time that I've heard Rikka say something to that effect.

Rikka's unexpected remark made my heart pound a little.

"R-right! I think so too! Um, well – ah, then how about tomorrow, we...?"

"Umm... Tomorrow's the Black Committee, so it's a bit..."

"....."

The Black Committee, huh.

I was pretty curious as to what it is that this Black Committee does, but I'm guessing it involved playing around with either Dekomori or Shichimiya. It would be unrefined of me to inquire about it.

"Oh, I see; my bad, sorry. It is pretty sudden, isn't it? But, yeah! We'll have some time to ourselves where it's just the two of us soon. I promise."

"D'accord, or in other words, understood! Hehe."

Rikka smiled happily as she said all that.

She then continued,

"If you break your promise, you must tell Yumeha that secret."

and added that.

“Hm, I guess it has to be that secret after all?”

“Eh, wait! There’s something related to me that needed to be kept a secret!?”

“Hm. Well, I’ll wait ten seconds then. You can take that time to reflect. One, two, three, four, five, six, seven, eight, ten.”

“Did the number nine vanish or something!?”

“Heh heh, it’s because a number like nine isn’t necessary.”

“Why!?”

I’m pretty sure it is necessary!?

No, I mean, seriously, wait, wait.

What secret was she talking about...? Could it be that, that one time where Rikka had stayed over in my room overnight!?

On the day that gets revealed to Yumeha, they’ll be a family meeting or something the day after for sure.

Or could it be that, that time where I accidentally ate the maboroshi no ume⁵ that Yumeha had been saving!?

No wait... Let’s be calm. It’ll all be fine as long as I keep my promise.

“W-well. Me, I’m a man who doesn’t break his promises.”

“Mm. That certainly is true. That’s why everything will be fine!”

This time, Rikka smiled impishly.

...It seemed that Rikka had been messing with me.

⁵ [Maboroshi no ume](#) (幻の梅, lit. phantom plum) is one of the best selling umeboshi (commonly translated as Japanese salt plums) sold by the store Okahata Nouen, which had received a gold [Monde Selection](#) reward in 2013.

As we carried out such an exchange, before long we arrived in front of Rikka's apartment. Although it was short, this time that we had spent together was, as expected, quite enjoyable.

It made me keenly feel Rikka's words, "It would be good if it could just be the two of us."

This sensation, I'll need to make sure that I won't forget it.

"Right. Well, I'll be seeing you on Monday. I'll be coming over then to pick you up."

"D'accord. Err, Yuuta, um..."

"Hm?"

"The area over there is a surveillance zone. Come here."

As she said that, from the front of Rikka's apartment – I got pulled into the entranceway.

I mean... since it is an area that's monitored, it certainly is possible to say that it is a surveillance zone, that area in front of Rikka's apartment. It wouldn't surprise me if the Demon King was watching.

"Yuuta, please hug me."

Rikka, with upturned eyes, gazed at me motionlessly as she whispered that.

"Eh, now?"

Since she had brought it up so suddenly, I once again became dumbfounded.

Up till now, nothing that was particularly out of the ordinary had happened. However, whether it was because of the mood, or because of the flow of events, Rikka had ended up begging for a hug. It was quite the unusual sight.

"...No?"

"No, no, of course not."

"...I mean, Yuuta, you don't embrace me very much. I – I may be wishing for Yuuta to replenish my magic more."

"Sorry, sorry. I haven't been hugging you at all."

It may have been the case that today's Rikka was Beg-san.

Of course, I too also had the desire to hug her lots, but I was a bit embarrassed or something. Was it the lack of experience, the timing, or something else?

Still, I was delighted to hear Rikka say something like that.

For Rikka to beg me for something – it was impossible for me to not fulfil her request!

And so, I hugged her.

I placed my hands around Rikka's small back and held her tightly.

"Mm. Yuuta, it's fine if you put more strength in it."

"Err... But if I do, I'll probably end up hurting you."

Her bringing it up made me realise.

Although I had intended on embracing Rikka tightly, I may have been subconsciously holding back. She is quite petite after all.

"...I see, Yuuta's *really* kind."

"No, well, um, ha, alright. Hug~."

I did as I was told and hugged Rikka tighter than I did before.

I hugged for so tightly to the point that I had never hugged anyone so strongly ever before in my life.

"Mmm. It's warm. Yuuta. As expected. Is big."

"Ah, sorry. It didn't hurt, did it?"

"Don't worry, it was fine. Mm, magic replenishment complete. Thank you, Yuuta."

"Yeah. Feel free to just say it if you need to replenish your magic."

As I said that, I gently placed my lips over Rikka's.

“My magic replenishment is complete as well.”

No matter how much time passes, I could never get used to saying such an embarrassing line, and so my voice quivered and came out high-pitched as I delivered said line.

Even so,

“I’m glad.”

said Rikka,

“My magic is also at its maximum.”

she continued shyly.

If our relationship could continue forever – although I always have that thought on my mind, today I felt that thought of mine particularly strongly. Regretably, however, we had to part, as I needed to return home soon – oh, but before that.

“Well, I need to return home soon. But before I do, here.”

I took out a notebook from my shoulder bag and handed it over to Rikka.

“Yep.”

Rikka accepted the notebook with a smile.

This too was something that had continued non-stop for a long time, a custom of ours when it was time for me to leave. After having also sighted Rikka’s smile, I said to Rikka, “See you,” and parted from Rikka from the front of Rikka’s apartment.

I returned home alone.

The trip back home was a bit lonely.

Exchange Diary: To Rikka

Saturday, 4th June.

I finally got the chance to write, and so I'm writing in a great hurry!

Sorry in advance if my handwriting's illegible!

It's already been six months!

It's gone by fast, hasn't it? I too feel that these six months had gone by in a blink of an eye. Instantaneous – was how it felt.

It goes without saying that after having met you, I have had all sorts of experiences in this half-year for sure.

As for me, they were all good experiences.

Well... some of them have also been a bit bitter as well.

Hideri-senpai's the same as ever, with her hair coloured like a rainbow, right? Regarding her, I too always think, "The heck was she saying, this person?" Ah, but please keep that a secret.

It's a secret that's just between the two of us, okay?

Also, since I'm extremely concerned about it, the details of "something not normal": please tell me all about it!

As for why I call Hideri-senpai Hideri-senpai... It's because I was told by Hideri-senpai, "We're fed up with being called Amaniji-senpai. With special feeling behind it, call us Hideri-senpai."

She's so unreasonable only to me, isn't she? I mean, I can't just suddenly gush up with special feeling, can I?

Kumin-senpai too is the same as ever, isn't she?

For some reason, Kumin-senpai had been extremely sorrowful about not being invited to throw the first ceremonial pitch. She kept pestering me with, “Why do you think I wasn’t invited? Why?” leading me to respond with, “It’s obvious why!”

It was obvious why she wasn’t invited!

Regarding the cooking battle, I’m fine with teaching you anything you like. However, in terms of cooking, it’s completely possible that I too cannot win against Shichimiya...

My cooking was largely self-taught, while Shichimiya has her grandmother as her master: she’s skilled!

However, I too have gotten better as a result of having undergone “training” with your older sister. Let’s improve at cooking together at my house again!

No, Dekomori and I, I believe that the two of us already get along with each other well.

Since Dekomori’s the only underclassman that I have, I did intend on looking after her very affectionately, but...

For some reason, Dekomori calls me Rag-kun, and it appeared that she treated me as if I was a person deserving of such a nickname...

But yeah, I guess I’ll do my best to get along with her.

No, it’s my intention to be on good terms with her, but...

Enchanting your nails... That’s the thing called “doing your nails”, right...?

I’m surprised. Or to be more precise, I’m surprised since I would have expected for Fuurin-chan to be the one to do your nails.

Then again, I guess something like this was Nibutani and her friends’ forte, wasn’t it?

Please show them to me next time.

But more importantly!

Congrats! You finally won again Fuurin-chan!

Fuurin-chan's quite strong, isn't she? I've already abandoned all hope of ever beating her. I'm already unable to keep up with the battle of different dimensions that you and Fuurin-chan are engaged in...!

Ah, me, I haven't awakened to a new ability.

I'm sorry.

But when I do awaken to one, I'll be sure to tell you.

I too enjoy doing this exchange diary!

It's definitely not annoying to me at all!

I feel like my diary entries have been nothing but replies though... Still, it's fun listening to Rikka tell me about all sorts of things.

Also, the things that I think are not dark.

Thank you for coming over today to celebrate Yumeha's birthday!

Yumeha was very happy that you came over too.

Please come over and play with her again.

I too will love you forever, Rikka!

Chapter 1: The Devilish Truth Stare Disappeared!?

The start of the week.

As per usual, I headed over to Rikka's apartment to pick her up. The arrangement was that on Monday, Wednesday, and Friday, I headed over to Rikka's apartment, and on Tuesday, Thursday, and Saturday, Rikka headed over to my house.

That it had also almost been a year since we had started this custom of ours – honestly, felt way too soon.

That's right.

In other words, almost a year had passed since I had first met – correction, since I had first exchanged contracts with Rikka. It was nostalgic, remembering how it all began.

While I had been a bit interested in her from the start (when I saw her back then, cute was what came to mind. Of course, it was the same even now), there was no way that I could have imagined that I would end up going out with Rikka, nor could I have dreamed that the two of us would end up dating for around a year.

Or rather: now that I think about it, the event that first sparked us exchanging contracts was a rather impossible development... That was the only way to describe it.

According to Rikka, two of us had met each other prior to us having enrolled at this school. Sadly, however, since I couldn't remember us meeting then (it seemed that meeting of ours had really happened, as when I asked a bunch of people about this indirectly, they responded with, "If I'm not mistaken, when the results were announced, you shouted some embarrassing lines." How embarrassing!), it wasn't that meeting that I was referring to as a rather impossible development. For someone to become contracted to a girl that they were escorting after said girl's eye started to suddenly hurt, and for that same someone to end up, among other things, dating said girl: other than me, there was no one else in the world that would have experienced an event like that.

But, then again, when I think about it, I guess it could be said that it was predestined.

I'm glad that Rikka had chuunibyou.

And that I had it too – although I had, at that time, claimed that I was a former chuunibyou patient, perhaps it was actually thanks to being infected with chuunibyou that I was able to sympathise with Rikka.

That's what I honestly think.

While I, for some reason or other, reminisced about the past in a manner that befitted the nostalgia of being contracted to Rikka for close to a year, I arrived at the front of Rikka's apartment.

The first time that I came to Rikka's apartment, her apartment did not have an intercom. However, as the apartment's security was now strengthened, her home was now equipped with an intercom.

There were a variety of reasons for why an intercom was installed, but as for right now, there wasn't a particular need for me to press it.

I had arrived on time, just like I said I would.

When I stood in front of the door, without having the time to press the intercom – the door to Rikka's apartment opened automatically.

The same thing happened the first time I came over – as I reminisced fondly about the past,

"G-good morning, Yuuta."

said Rikka as she came out.

".....?"

Something felt off. Although it was a phrase that I had used an awful lot in the past, it was precisely because of how much I had overused that phrase that my use of it this time emphasised just how off things felt.

It wasn't at level where things just sort of felt off.

To start, her uniform was normal. The frills that she had added to her skirt had disappeared. The various accessories that she used to wear were also gone. Opposite from usual, she had a bandage wrapped around her right arm, but that was probably just to hide Yumeha's doodle from the other day. But most importantly of all, Rikka's eyepatch was gone – while that in and of itself was not problematic, as there occasionally "release period" days where she didn't wear her eyepatch, the thing behind her eyepatch, Rikka's eye, *was not gold*.

In other words.

It was not the Devilish Truth Stare.

"G-good morning. ...Um, what happened?"

I tried throwing her a question that went straight to the point.

"Ahaha. Well. Don't be surprised, okay...?"

Although Rikka's tone, choice of words, and behaviour felt extremely off,

"O-okay."

I somehow managed to nod my head in agreement.

"When I got up this morning, the Devilish Truth Stare had disappeared..."

“!?”

It was earth-shattering – in other words, it was something beyond my comprehension.

“That’s why, I’m normal today.”

“Rather, even the way that you talk has changed!?”

“Maybe the way I talked before had also been one of its abilities...”

“Of course it would be one of the Devilish Truth Stare’s abilities!!! Wait, huh!? Are you feeling okay!?”

“Y-yeah! I feel like I’m full of energy⁶?”

After saying that, Rikka made a pose where she extended both of her hands to the sky.

...Preparing to form a Spirit Bomb: sure enough, it was a mystery as to whether it was the correct pose to make to show off how much energy one had.

“I, I see... For the time being, that’s reassuring to hear... At least for now...”

It was also a mystery as to whether I should be feeling relieved by her “energy” point, but, well, it was better to be energetic and healthy than not. It seemed that it wasn’t the case that she had lost the Devilish Truth Stare due to having suffered from a high fever or something.

“Um, can you think of why the Devilish Truth Stare had disappeared...?”

“Hmm...? I’m not sure why... When I woke up this morning, I just suddenly felt that it was gone...”

“Is that so...?”

“S-sorry?”

“No no, it’s not Rikka’s fault at all.”

Hah – I took a deep breath.

Previously, I had been so surprised that my thoughts had not caught up with me yet. Now, however, I was finally beginning to calm down.

By now, when it came to the Devilish Truth Stare, I was under the impression that it was a real ability of Rikka, but when I think about it calmly – it was the product of her chuunibyou... the Devilish Truth Stare.

⁶ This, and the following lines, plays on the word 元気, which can mean lively/in good health/energetic. In the first line, Rikka replies with 私は元気だよ?, which roughly translates to “I’m feeling fine?”. To prove this, Rikka then makes the 元気玉, or the Spirit Bomb, pose, leading to Yuuta to conclude that Rikka, at the very least, had 元気.

Eh, then, could this be a hidden camera prank!?

Although it was rather rude of me to do so without saying anything, I went and checked my surroundings: there was no one there. I was expecting for Dekomori to come out from somewhere and say, “Te-tete-te-death! You have been deceived, Idiot Flame Master!”, but it didn’t seem like that was going to be the case.

And from how Rikka looked too: it didn’t seem like she had planned for a hidden camera prank.

In that case, it may be more natural to assume that Rikka’s Devilish Truth Stare had disappeared because something had happened to her.

As for what that said something was – I had absolutely no idea.

The cause, huh...

“What did you eat yesterday?”

“Er, umm, yesterday I had fried rice! Your special fried rice! It was delicious!”

It appeared that she had not eaten something bad.

It was a bit of a simplistic idea though, to think that food was the cause.

“Had anything unusual happened?”

“Hmm... not that I can think of...? Ah, did you appear in my dream?”

“Huh, I appear every night!?”

“Yep! You almost always appear! The Yuuta of just the other day taught me a way of doing laundry cleanly. It’s funny to remember, hehe.”

“The dream me, was I Rikka’s mom or something!?”

The content of her dream aside, it didn’t seem like anything unusual had happened either.

Alright. Let’s try a slightly different approach.

“Um, the ability from the other day – could we not head to school quickly with Wicked Nine Nights?”

“A-ah. Uh, er, um, I’m sorry. Right now, I can’t use abilities at all. I apologise...”

I was apologised to. Over something absurd.

It felt like I had done something that I needed to apologise greatly for.

“N-no, I’m the one that should be apologising. I just thought that maybe there was some leftover power or something...”

“I, I see, that makes sense! B-but, I’m sorry. It doesn’t seem like...”

"No no, Rikka, it's not your fault at all, so, it's okay, relax."

No no. This isn't what I should be doing.

That's right. The loss of her abilities: the one that was the most uneasy about it was Rikka. Before trying to find out what the cause of it was, I should be checking in with Rikka to see how she was feeling about all this first.

"Um, are you troubled by the fact that you don't have abilities?"

"Hm? Um, not really? I don't feel that I have powers anymore, but apart from that I'm okay, I think."

"I see. If you do start feeling troubled, please tell me, okay?"

"Yeah! Thank you, Yuuta. You really are kind, aren't you Yuuta?"

"No no, it's only natural for me to do this much. Since I'm your contractee, and your boyfriend."

"...Hey, um,"

Stopping her words there, Rikka looked at me anxiously.

Then, after a short pause, she continued.

"Today's me... Is it no good?"

I gave an immediate reply.

"It's excessively cute!"

To be frank, it may have been because I've never seen Rikka like this before that I felt this way, but regardless of whether it was because of how unexpected this Rikka was or due to the gap between this Rikka and the usual Rikka, I found this Rikka to be the absolute cutest.

She was so cute that I wanted to hug her right here and now. But, I will restrain myself.

"Ehhh, is that so?"

"....."

What is this adorable creature!

This bashful yet happy-looking Rikka is also the absolute cutest!

This novel and fresh Rikka was so cute that the conversation ended up being me just boasting about how cute she was.

It wasn't that I was flirting with her.

If I kept on calling her cute repeatedly like this (even though I've already called her cute an awful lot of times already) I would seem like an idiot (I felt that I already gave off that impression).

And so, to put an end to the conversation,

"Anyway, for the time being, let's head to school."

I urged us to leave for school.

"Yeah. We have to hurry, or else we'll be late!"

As she said that, Rikka broke into a run. Her retreating figure too: it somehow seemed different from usual. It was strangely cute.

Since she was already cute, I guess her being like this is fine.

Chapter 2: Contractee Showdown! Yuuta VS Dekomori-death!

It was not fine.

While I did have an excuse – that such a Rikka was also cute – it was an undeniable fact that I had, for a brief moment, honestly thought that it was fine for Rikka stay like this.

I anguished over that fact alone in the classroom.

By the way, Rikka wasn't in this classroom – after advancing to second year, our classes got shuffled. And so, having been moved to class 2-1, I was separated from Rikka.

With the exception of what was known in my former class as the Summer Trio (Nibutani, Sasa, and Miyoshi), everyone who I was good friends with, such as Isshiki, was in a different class from me.

Such was the sad reality I lived in... Furthermore, by some mysterious stroke of fate (perhaps it was an eternal connection), I had been seated next to Nibutani the entire time – the days of her finding endless numbers of faults with me continued...

As for Rikka, she had been placed in the same class as Shichimiya and Fuurin-chan, class 2-2. It seemed that she was having a lot of fun.

Honestly, I was seriously envious of her.

Anyway, that aside for now – no, wait. It suddenly occurred to me: it could very well be the fact that it was her new surroundings that had caused her to change.

That after having changed classes, the change in environment caused Rikka to change – but if that were the case, isn't it strange that it's happening "now" rather than a little while ago, when she first changed classes?

In that case, that line of thought was also a little patchy.

Hmm.

Then, what was the cause!?

Or to be more precise, "Did that Rikka really choose stop having chuunibyou?" was the big question that I kept circling back to. We've been together for a year now, but I've never seen her acting like this before. Not even once.

Not even for an instant.

No matter what the situation was, Rikka was always the chuunibyou-infected Rikka.

That Rikka: would she suddenly choose to stop having chuunibyou?

No.

From my point of view, I didn't think that could be the case at all.

Much like the present Rikka, I too was a person who had, in their past, been infected with chuunibyou.

And in my opinion, the moment where a person decides it is time to stop being infected with chuunibyou comes for everyone.

However, the decision to stop is always accompanied by a “cause”.

It was the same for me as well: although I had a variety of “causes”, the big “cause” known as the high school entrance exams was what led me to stop.

Surely, Rikka must have encountered some kind of cause too – if that’s the case, then there definitely was a need for me to investigate about it.

But, to do that, I’ll need to identify the cause first.

So that’s why, during first period.

During P.E – the joint class between class 2-1 and class 2-2.

I decided to observe Rikka.



“Wha-wha-wha, what should I be doing?” “Ow... it hurts...” “Hm? Which one is our goal?” “Wow! That’s a foul~!” “Eh!? The opposing team got a point? Well then, how many points do we need to for a comeback?” “Everyone’s like a dog, woof woof.” “Why is there no referee?”

Of all things, those were the words that came out from Rikka’s mouth.

There were all things that even I had come to think Rikka would never say.

No, but the fact of the matter is that Rikka had indeed said all that. Then again, perhaps this Rikka was a fake.

Or more precisely, perhaps this was the hidden personality Itsuka-chan⁷? If that’s the case, then her behaving like this is pretty chuunibyou-ish.

In the past, there was that brief period of time where Kuzuha had declared, “In me, another me – Momiji⁸ – exists,” wasn’t there? Could this be something similar?

Is it not the case that Rikka was doing something similar here?

Hah... Let’s stop trying to escape from reality.

⁷ A pun lost in translation. Here, Yuuta makes the connection between Rikka (六花) and Itsuka (五花).

⁸ Another pun. Here, the connection is made between Kuzuha (樟葉), which when translated directly means “camphor leaves”, and Momiji (紅葉), which when translated directly means “maple leaves”.

If Rikka really had a setting like that, she would have revealed it a long time ago.

Oh, and by the way, we were currently playing a game of “ultimate”.

At our school, P.E worked on a selective system, with “ultimate” or “creative dance” being our choices for the first semester. Since Rikka chose ultimate without hesitation (she probably made her choice just off the name), I copied her and also chose ultimate.

I wanted to be in the same classes as Rikka as much as possible!

And it was a sport that both sexes could enjoy together!

At any rate, the Rikka who was in this sort of state was currently giving it her all in this close game of ultimate.

Hmm, the Rikka who was struggling like that was also quite cute.

Damn, this illness of mine where I declare “Rikka’s cute” when I let my mind wander – back to the main topic.

If it were the usual Rikka, she would say “This is Devilish Truth Stare’s power!” and become the most active girl on the field, freely making use of her innate outstanding reflexes.

For her to become this incompetent after unexpectedly lost her powers: who could have guessed? No one.

It was sort of like proof that the Devilish Truth Stare really did give Rikka powers.

But, well, if Rikka didn’t have chuunibyou, would she have been an ordinary girl like this?

A girl who talked normally, laughed normally, and got along with the rest of the girls in her class normally.

She may have yearned for it after viewing her new surroundings – it was possible that she was “moving on”, no, “evolving”.

This line of thought, that she’s “evolving” – this may just possibly be it.

But most importantly, Rikka appeared to be enjoying herself more than usual.

I wasn’t sure if that really was the case, or if it just seemed that way in my mind.

Regardless, there was one thing that I was certain of: Rikka was nothing but cute.



In the end, I didn’t reach a conclusion on the “cause” investigation. Although my observation of Rikka ended with my chronic illness getting worse (the people around me began to make fun of me for having my eye on Rikka all the time), I did manage to gain something from it.

I learnt that watching Rikka acting normal from afar wasn't bad.

Although it didn't look like she was going to revert back to how she was before, perhaps... With that sliver of hope in mind, I hurried over to Rikka when the class ended.

"Well, Rikka? Does it feel like your powers are starting to come back?"

"Nope. Not at all. But, it's fine! I'm full of energy!"

"O-oh... But, it seemed to me that you didn't move around as much as you usually did...?"

"Hmm, maybe that too was an ability."

"It truly is amazing! It is isn't it, the Devilish Truth Stare!"

We did the exact same exchange for the second time today.

Wait no, it wasn't just the way she talked this time – its influence on even her physical abilities was enormous!

"Amazing? It's the strongest."

It's the strongest.

Those words of hers felt tacked on and failed to give off a very strong-ish feeling – nevertheless, I was able to make good discovery.

Rikka's usual tone was what gave her boasts that "strongest" feeling.

"Well then, Yuuta, I'm going to go get changed. See you soon."

"Ah, sorry, sorry. Then, I'll see you soon."

Fatigued from ultimate, Rikka's steps were rather shaky as she headed towards the girl's changing room alone. Given her current state, I wanted to accompany her until she got there. As expected, however, the girl's changing room wasn't a place that I could go to.

Resigning myself, I too began moving towards the boy's changing room.

But still: until today, I've never seen Rikka in that sort of state before.

Usually at the end of P.E, she looked as if she hadn't strained herself at all.

Although seeing her like that worried me, it could just be the case that the loss of the Devilish Truth Stare was throwing her off.

That feeling of not having that thing that you've always had – it may have been throwing her off both physically and mentally.

It wouldn't surprise me if an accident were to occur to her.

An accident.

Although Rikka had told me that it disappeared this morning, if it was the case that an accident had happened recently – it must have been something that happened yesterday.

The day prior yesterday, Saturday – nothing unusual had happened, I think. Unless it was the case that I had missed that “something”.

Yesterday – if I remember correctly, Rikka had said something about a “Black Committee” – as I was thinking that, as if to cancel out that thought of mine, something suddenly collided into my back.

I felt an impact, or rather, a sharp pain.

It was uncouth of me, but reflexively shouted, “Gah!”

Although the impact was great to the point that I was about to collapse on the spot, I somehow managed to keep myself upright.

The inside of the school building – not the sort of place that I would want others to see my unsightly collapsed figure.

But, what the heck was that? To find out, I turned my head around.

What I saw – it was the figure of my upperclassman who had flopped down on the ground magnificently, Dekomori.

The figure of her collapsed on the ground – it was no exaggeration to say that it looked truly splendid. Still, from the way she glared at me – it would not have been strange if she had killed me with just her eyes.

“What are you doing, Dekomori...?”

“Ah, it’s Dark-something-or-other. You were there-death?”

“You were scowling at me just now, weren’t you! Or rather, weren’t you the culprit who attacked me from behind!?”

“Is this heresy-death?”

“It certainly is true that I’m currently being treated as a heretic – wait, don’t treat me as one!”

“What a low-level retort... It definitely is Dark Flame Master-death. However, for even Dekomori’s Super Inazuma Drop Kick to deal no damage-death: Dekomori is impressed-death.”

“You drop-kicked me!? Just what sort of grudge do you hold against me!?”

Being drop-kicked hurt: it caused a sharp pain to flash through my body.

Still, for her to have drop-kicked me so nicely... And in such a public place too.

Even though she was wearing a skirt. Even though she was a young heiress.

Yes.

Dekomori Sanae – the young heiress of the Dekomori conglomerate.

As for why a lady of her stature had decided to enrol into this strange (in both the good and bad sense) school: naturally, it was only because of the fact that the person that she respects and admires from the bottom of her heart, Rikka, attends this school.

The rich had so much freedom.

I was green with envy.

And, she was also the only underclassman I had. Needless to say, Dekomori was the only one who joined that weird (in both the good and bad sense) club of ours.

While there had been others who had come to trial our club (in a sense, I guess they were victims), without exception, all of them had fled.

I thought that this outcome was only natural.

After all, there were only a limited number of people that could keep up with Hideri-senpai's eccentricity.

Although I had followed up on them afterwards, those first years who came to trial the club – they may have been traumatised. By the strange rainbow-coloured person that exists among the third years. Those poor souls.

That's why Dekomori was the only underclassman that I had (to be frank, I've always wanted to have an underclassman. Having one made me happy).

Pulling myself together, I readied myself to treat her with the kindness of an upperclassman.

Even though I got drop-kicked, I resolved myself to not get angry.

"...Well, I guess I too have days where I want to successfully drop-kick someone. So, did you need me for something?"

"Huh? You have days like that-death?"

Gracefully, Dekomori slowly got up.

As expected of a young heiress.

And, that is absolutely right. It's utterly unbearable when such days come around.

"In addition, there's nothing that Dekomori would need from you, Dark Flame Master!!! Your only saving grace is that your presence is so thin that you get overlooked when you do something...!"

As she said that, Dekomori skilfully coiled that Mjölfnir Hammer that she was so proud of (it was just her twin-tails) around my arm. As if to say, "You will not escape."

It looked like it'd hurt Dekomori if I pulled my arm back though...

"Wait, you're still dragging out that setting!? Also, something like that isn't the case at all!"

"Lies-death! The photos from last year's cultural festival and sports festival! It has been confirmed that you do not appear in them at all, not even once-death!"

"Don't say that, stop it!"

It was not the truth!

In things like the play, I more or less was in a leading role!

Let's stop saying things that make me sad!

"It doesn't really matter if you appear or not-death!"

"If that's true then don't bring it up! I'll cry!"

"Dekomori's the one who wants to cry here-death! Hey, you bastard, what did you do to Master-death!?"

"Eh, huh, I didn't do anything!"

I unintentionally stuttered.

I somehow managed to push back against Dekomori. Still, the way she pressed me was so intense that I might even start to think that I'm actually at fault if she kept pressing me like this.

"Lies-death! When Dekomori... this morning, when Dekomori went to greet Master like usual-death... Master... Master...!!! She had such an unladylike appearance!!!"

"An unladylike appearance..."

I guess to Dekomori, Rikka's current appearance appear rather unladylike.

Still, her choice of words felt a little...

I wonder if it had to do with her speaking ill of her Master.

"It must have been because of you-death!!! It could be no one else but you!!! DEATH-DEATH!!!"

After having said all that, Dekomori immediately hopped into fighting stance.

The situation was as dangerous as it looked.

While the current situation – an underclassman had coiled her twin-tails around my arm – was already bad enough as it is, if things became violent: even if our school was a rather strange school, it wouldn't be surprising if Dekomori ended up getting suspended.

To stop that from happening as her upperclassman, I guess that I'll need to give in a little.

It's a bit saddening though, since I'm predicting that I'll be getting abused one-sidedly.

If only I could divert her attention somehow – although it was a bit late, but right as I thought that, I noticed something unusual.

Dekomori was different from usual. Her twin-tail weapon was different.

"O-oh, what's this? Dekomori. That's new. The flower-patterned drawstring bag that you have on. It's cute; did you get it from Rikka?"

"Ah, you noticed-death?"

Dekomori looked a little happy.

Operation Diversion, great success!

"In the case of a flower pattern, the devotee should, of their own accord, praise Dekomori extravagantly by saying, 'This in the language of flowers means...'-death."

"Now I wish I hadn't noticed!"

What do you mean by devotee!

I mean, you do have a lot of admirers, but still!

As for why she had her admirers: her appearance is still that of a beautiful girl, that Dekomori.

As an aside, about the flower on that flower pattern – it was a flower that everyone knows, the lily⁹. Of course, I wasn't well versed in the language of flowers, so I had no idea what that meant.

"Huh? Then, that means you were trying to distract Dekomori-death? That's not going to work-death."

"T-that's it. Violence is no good. It could end up getting you suspended from school. Rikka would be sad if you get suspended, wouldn't she?"

"Tch... That's true-death..."

"Furthermore, look. There are people watching."

Like I've said many times before, we were currently inside the school building – at the front entrance, to be precise.

⁹ In Japanese, Lily is pronounced 'yuri', which, incidently, is also the slang for girls' love.

Although it was the short break between the first and second period, there were still quite a few people around. They were all probably in a similar situation to me and were coming back to the main building from P.E or something.

This scene just now was exactly what was being exposed to the public.

The gazes of the people who had passed us just now hurt.

I could constantly feel the far too specific ‘What on earth are these guys doing so early in the morning?’ gaze stabbing into me.

“Tch. Guess it can’t be helped-death. Dekomori didn’t plan on using it since it’s still in the prototype phase, but...”

“Eh?”

“Watch-death! This is Dekomori’s power! Daydream System – start! Vanishment this world-death!”

As Dekomori said those words – the world changed.

I didn’t mean that metaphorically – the world literally changed.

Until just now, we had been at the entrance of the school building. Now, however, we were in a place resembling traditional Japan.

I was alone with Dekomori in this mysterious place.

“Hu-huh!? What just happened!?”

“Hmph. This is Dekomori-Corporation-developed Daydream System-death! Where ideals and delusions manifest in reality – in other words, this could be said to be a world created by Dekomori-death! This is a place that’s safe from the public’s eye-death!”

“What is this super technology!? Or rather, is it okay for you to be showing something like this at school...?”

“It’s fine-death. The Dekomori Corporation’s power is tremendous-death, ge-heh-heh.”

“Stop laughing right now!”

She matches the arrogant rich person stereotype, laughing like that right now.

Still, to think that what Dekomori had said previously, that “Dekomori’s ability is the power to move between the 2D and 3D realm-death!”, had finally become real...

That ability – or perhaps I should say, that technological strength – of hers.

The rich are amazing.

Although I had found VR impressive and had thought that a world driven by VR would come in the near future, seeing all this made me think that said near future had invaded the present already.

“The principles behind this system are similar to the ones involved in the practical applications of VR-death. It’s sort of like Dekomori’s thoughts being shared to you as a VR space-death. Since it is necessary to specify the space, just now Dekomori’s bodyguards needed to enclose Dekomori and Dark Flame Master together with a specialised machine that they were carrying.”

“You really do have bodyguards and the like... Still, it is rather complicated, so I don’t quite understand...”

“That’s because you’re an idiot-death.”

“That’s not... Well, it’s not like I can deny that I’m not smart though. Still, why a traditional Japanese place?”

“Because a traditional Japanese place makes Kyoto Prefecture – a place which, Dekomori believes, fills Master with joy – come to mind-death.”

“Certainly, a traditional Japanese place does make one think of Kyoto Prefecture, and certainly, Rikka likes Kyoto, but a traditional Japanese place and Kyoto Prefecture are two completely different things!?”

And in addition to what’s already been said!

This place is Osaka Prefecture! Osaka City! This seems more like a love of your hometown!

“Ge-heh-heh, it’s just a virtual world-death.”

“Isn’t that convenient...!”

“Well, on the topic of loving one’s hometown: don’t forget, Dark Flame Master, that you too wanted to visit Dekomori’s home-death. Dekomori is prideful of all the local wonders-death.”

“Well, that’s true, but...”

...Although it was a little on the outskirts, this place was indeed Osaka.

In addition, the Dekomori family mansion was super famous.

Even if you didn’t want to boast, your house is treated as a very famous landmark, Lady Dekomori.

“Ge-heh-heh, and since the area around Dekomori’s house is all Deko-owned land, from here on out you can look forward to the mansion being expanded even further-death!”

“I wonder if it even can get any more extravagant... Or rather, don’t talk about the surrounding land like it’s state-owned land or something.”

“No no, the thing is, the Dekomori family actually does own the land-death. The area around here – including this school, as a matter of fact – is mostly Deko-owned land-death. That’s why, to commemorate Dekomori’s enrolment into this school, Dekomori was thinking about changing the name of the school to “Super Dekomori Academy”-death.”

“Eh, but I don’t want to go to a school called that! You absolutely can’t!”

As I said that, Dekomori laughed and responded with “Gehehe, kidding-death.”

While there were things I wanted to praise her for in regard to her laughing, such as the improvements she had made in terms of when she chooses to laugh and what she is laughing about, it was still a little problematic. Since Dekomori was a rich person, it made it impossible to tell whether she was joking or not. Please be more careful about the things you say.

“That too is something that you should not be concerned about-death. The unpleasant remarks will be blacked out later-death.”

“I [REDACTED]”

“What is the Dark Flame Master saying all of a sudden-death!? What dangerous remarks-death! Unpleasant-death! Terrible-death!”

“But I’m not saying anything unpleasant or terrible!”

Or rather, what kind of unpleasant remark even follow after an “I”?

“[REDACTED]-death.”

“Your remarks have also become unpleasant!?”

“Oh! That was rude of Dekomori-death.”

Dekomori apologised.

Since she had apologised, it seems that she really did make a dangerous remark...

Not that I’ve said anything bad.

“Still, this really is like a world out of an anime or something. And with the environment being based off traditional Japanese architecture, it feels futuristic yet nostalgic.”

“Futuristic yet nostalgic¹⁰? Dark Flame Master... Your chip is broken-death.”

“What chip!?”

¹⁰ Likely a reference to the Megaman X Comic in Japan where, when Zero dies, he laments to X, 「連れていってくれよ...お前の...つくる 懐かしい...未...来...へ.....」 (loosely translates to “take me to... the nostalgic future... that... you... create...”).

“Well, Dark Flame Master is correct in saying that this world is like something out of an anime-death. Since ‘making an unrealistic world a reality’ is this system’s goal-death. This is completely unrelated, but speaking of anime: isn’t it strange that people say things like ‘at least watch until the 3rd episode’ when it comes to anime-death?”

“That really was completely unrelated!”

But, well, that is something that I hear quite often.

It’s a phrase that you don’t really hear when it comes to stuff like movies.

Then again, I’m not sure how I’d feel if I heard someone say ‘just watch the first 30 minutes’ in regard to a movie.

“Isn’t that a strange way of promoting it-death? If it’s interesting from the very first episode, then when promoting it, you should be telling people to watch until the very end-death!”

“...That certainly is true.”

“And so, no matter the anime, everyone should watch until the very end-death! Right-death?”

“...And who are you to be saying all of this?”

But, then again, I do agree with what Dekomori was saying.

I too think that there are a surprising number of works in this world that make you go, “It’s the best!” when you watch it until the very end.

“Ah! It’s not the case that Dekomori enjoyed this stupid conversation with the Dark Flame Master-death! Dekomori must defeat Master’s enemy-death!”

“But it felt like your aim had changed... Or to be more precise, it felt like you had fun talking with me.”

“Huh!? From a conversation with a bastard like you!? D-Dekomori did not have fun-death!!!”

Dekomori was very upset.

She was visibly flustered.

“Dekomori was careless-death... Dekomori will just say this is a mistaken memory-death...”

“You’re going to say that it’s fake!?”

“And then, by erasing Dark Flame Master’s memory – it’s perfect-death!”

As she said that, Dekomori unfastened the Mjölnir Hammer that had been coiled around my arm this whole time (I completely forgot that it was there too) at last.

Then, brandishing that hammer as is –

“Mjöltnir Hammer – memory erasure mode!”

Upon saying that, it seemed that her ideals had changed reality – what used to be merely her hair, Dekomori’s Mjöltnir Hammer, underwent a transformation. It transformed into a super enormous hammer that would erase my memory – no, my very existence itself – for sure if it hit me.

“Generic Mjöltnir Hammer-death!!!”

“Why does that sound like something anyone could use!?”

You wanted to say ‘Genesis’ or something, didn’t you!?

“Grr... shut it-death! Disappear, along with your existence-death!!!”

“You said you were going to erase my memory, but as expected you were looking to kill me, weren’t you!!!”

Before I had been able to shout that out, Dekomori had already leapt towards – no, already soared into the sky.

This too seemed like the result of her ideals and delusions changing reality – Dekomori easily surpassed 5 metres in height with her leap.

Still, for something like this to occur, just what kind of system was this!?

Will I even be okay if I get hit by that?

Even though it’s such an enormous hammer?

Even though it’s been brought down at me from such an extremely high place?

The answer is – I had no idea. But what I did know is that I didn’t want to get hit!

And so!

“Tch. As expected of someone named Dark Flame Master-death.”

I utilised the system.

My ideals and delusions changed reality – on the spur of the moment, I took off the indoor shoes that I had on and defended myself with them.

It seemed that choice of mine was correct – a dark flame shield appeared promptly to intercept that enormous hammer.

“This is the Dark Flame Barrier.”

“That name, it’s lame-death.”

“Shush! Unlike you, I don’t have the talent to name things!”

“However-death.”

Dekomori sneered as she said that.

“Did you know-death? That twin-tails are known as twin-tails because of the twin-death?”

“Wha-”

Even before I was able to express my surprise, the twin fragment appeared right beside her – another king-sized hammer flew towards me as if she was playing Daruma Otoshi¹¹.

It’s hopeless – I thought.

The instant that I had thought that.

The world had once again completely changed.

The current world – the real world.

We were back where we started – inside the school building, at the entrance.

After that, Dekomori struck my cheeks with her twin-tails (of course, it was just hair, and not something like the Generic Mjöltnir Hammer) as if she was mashing a potato. Naturally, it wasn’t particularly painful.

“Hu-huh?”

I checked my surroundings.

There was no one else around.

I was now doubtful as to whether or not I really did return to reality.

“About five minutes-death. If you dreamed – were you able to dream a lot-death?”

“Don’t say a ‘did you have a nice dream?’-ish sort of thing!”

I was pulled back to reality immediately!

“Ge-heh-heh. Relax-death, this is reality-death. As for why there’s no one around – it’s because the break has already ended-death.”

“Seriously!?”

But this year, I was aiming for the perfect attendance award!

After all, last year I had skipped out on a good number of classes...

Sigh.

¹¹ [A traditional Japanese game that is usually played with a 5-piece daruma doll](#). The aim of the game is to see how many of the bottom pieces one can knock out before the daruma topples over.

"In addition, up until just now, Dekomori's bodyguards had been busy clearing this place of people-death. Fun fact: a bystander would likely think 'what dangerous people' upon sighting Dekomori's personnel."

"You're that conscious of public attention!?"

"Well, Dekomori is a member of the Dekomori family – it would be troubling if Dekomori was seen behaving like that-death."

"Eh...? Isn't it already too late for that?"

I'm pretty sure that a person who suddenly drop-kicks someone as a joke would be thought of as a 'dangerous person'...

I think that after this, the only people that would join this club would be dangerous people.

"There's no need to worry-death. Dekomori is an honour student-death. Therefore, people would think, 'Ah, for even Dekomori-san to drop-kick someone: that must have been a dangerous guy, right?'-death. And when this honour student is late-death: 'Dekomori-san must have been late because of that dangerous guy, right?' All the blame will be falling to you-death."

"Can you stop involving me in everything!?"

I don't want to be considered a dangerous person, nor do I want to be late.

Although, as for being considered a dangerous person – I had a feeling that ship had long sailed.

Thanks to the "help" of a certain upperclassman.

"However, about five minutes seems to still be the limit-death."

"Yeah but still, I did seriously think that I was going to die."

"Are you an idiot-death? You don't die in ideals and delusions-death. That's right – people die in reality-death."

"Don't add that last part on so naturally as if it you had just said something obvious!"

"Right – Dekomori said it because it was obvious-death. It was just a VR space-death. Just because it looked like it doesn't mean that our ideals and delusions actually got materialised in reality-death. We're not Real-Booting¹² or anything-death."

"Well, I guess that's true."

¹² A term from the visual novel *Chaos;Head*: the ability of Gigalomaniacs to trick people to thinking delusions are real.

“Dekomori is in the midst of developing this for Master-death, so this was a good trial-death. Thank you very much for your cooperation-death, test subject no. 1. Err, so why were the two of us talking again-death?”

Dekomori – seemingly in confusion – tilted her head.

It seemed that she seriously couldn’t remember.

“Well, see, Rikka’s powers have disappeared, and it’s been troubling me as well –”

“AAAH! That’s right-death! Taking a step forward for the sake of Master♪ made Dekomori so happy that she forgot-death! You damn bastard, how dare you play the test subject card-death!”

“What does that even mean!? Did you mean to say playing the victim card!?”

“Why did you take away Master’s powers-death!”

“...I don’t have such an ability! Calm down, calm down: I wanted to have a chat with you about this as well!”

“Death-death...!”

“Don’t make such a strange voice. See, I too don’t know why it happened. That’s why – ah! I should go consult with everyone about this.”

“Everyone!?”

“Ah, no, just with Hideri-senpai and the others.”

“Hmph. With Rainbow-senpai?”

Making a complete 180, Dekomori went from being full of rage to wearing a face that looked as if she had been convinced.

Her allegiance (?) to Hideri-senpai was a mystery to me.

When she joined the club, she had apparently confessed to Rikka, “As a Dekomori, Dekomori has seen all sorts of people – but Dekomori never seen a person as dangerous as this-death. It is Dekomori’s opinion that it would be best for us to obey her unconditionally-death.”

Although it could very well just be that Dekomori was simply just fearful of Hideri-senpai...

Still, Hideri-senpai certainly did seem to be part of the elite and extraordinary portion of humanity who could have a large influence on others – she’s likely had a large influence on me too, after all.

Even so, it’s not like I’ve pledged my allegiance to her like Dekomori seemed to have had.

By the way, Hideri-senpai had also taken quite a fancy to Dekomori, saying, “To be serious in attaching a drawstring bag to your twin-tails every morning, isn’t that very interesting! That’s not very normal, we like it.”

By thinking of it like that, I too couldn’t help but be amazed by Dekomori.

Imagining her cheerfully attach those drawstring bags of hers every morning – it certainly was very cute.

“Huh, so it’ll be a club activity-death. Not bad, for one of Dark Flame Master’s ideas - death.”

“...You sure love your club activities, Dekomori.”

“If it weren’t for you being there, Dekomori would love club activities even more-death.”

“Why so bitter all of a sudden?”

“Dekomori is vexed when the Dark Flame Master is there-death...”

Dekomori corrected herself cutely.

Wait no, but the implication behind the words didn’t change at all. Why did she even bother correcting herself!

“Dark Flame Master! In our next break, call everyone to an emergency meeting-death! Is that understood, you punk-death!¹³”

“...Understood, Dekomori-san.”

“Good-death.”

It wasn’t clear to me if she was satisfied because I consented to calling for an emergency meeting, or because I attached the honorific to her name. Nevertheless, a massive smile could be seen on Dekomori-san’s face as she left this place.

It seemed somehow, the positions of who the upperclassman and underclassman were had gotten reversed.

Well, it wasn’t like that was a problem or anything.

Still, I did manage to take away at least one thing from that long conversation with Dekomori. While it was kind of sad that I had been only able to take away one thing for certain from that long conversation – what I did take away was important.

Rikka had told *even Dekomori* that her powers had disappeared.

For her to not have her powers even when I’m not around, it can only mean that.

¹³ A reference to the 1988 animated film *Akira*, [where prior to a duel between the two Kaneda demands Tetsuo to address him with an honorific](#).

That is – that the Devilish Truth Stare had really disappeared.

Just what exactly was happening with Rikka?

My feelings of anxiety only grew stronger.

Also.

What would be a good excuse for being late...?

Chapter 3: The Not Normal Emergency Meeting!

As ordered by Dekomori-san (well, not really, since I was already planning on consulting everyone), I sent a text saying “I would like a consultation about something. Next break, could you please come to the clubroom?” to every club member.

The replies came one after the other.

“Roger~☆.” “Hm? But Dekomori was already aware of this-death?” “” “I was sleeping.” The responses were all rather different.

Only Shichimiya! It was only Shichimiya who replied properly! And straight away as well! Thank you! If it’s for you, Shichimiya, I’ll do anything!

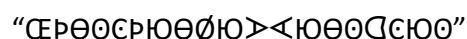
Every time I contact everyone by text, I end up feeling this way.

Especially since Hideri-senpai only replies in special characters (as if to say “this is special, and not normal, right?”). That’s why, whenever possible, I try to avoid contacting everyone by text. As for Kumin-senpai, it was good that I was able to get a response: usually, she doesn’t send a reply. Her reply this time was as late as it could be. It came just as class was about to end.

Speaking of which – it was now the next break.

Seating in our respective places (before we knew it, each of us had decided on our own favourite place to sit in the clubroom), we had all assembled at the clubroom in a timely manner. It was an all-member meeting.

And when everyone had gathered at the clubroom, Hideri-senpai smiled,

“

and said that.

Rather than “she said that”, it was more of an “what on earth was this person saying” kind of feeling. Regardless, Hideri-senpai said something in a non-human language.

“What on earth are you saying? Are you trying to be a crazy character?”

I scolded her.

She may be my upperclassman, but I still had to tell her off sternly.

“No no, see, since this is the first time you’ve seen us today, we needed to start off with something strange. Otherwise, our identity will crumble. If the choices were to live, to die, or to do something strange, the clear choice is to do something strange, right?”

“You’ve added a new option to the choice between life and death! Furthermore, please don’t choose that new option! Alright alright, since we don’t have much time, let’s just wrap that exchange up at here.”

“Ehh!? Already!? Alhideri¹⁴!?”

“What the heck does alhideri even mean!?”

“It means, ‘You’re not going to keep playing along with us!? But it’s fun!’ You had your fill of messing about with Dekomori just now, didn’t you?”

“How did you...!?”

As I said that, my underclassman cleared her throat with an aggressive “ahem”. “Hurry it up-death”, her glare seemed to say.

Hmm... If I didn’t retort to each and every little thing, things would proceed a lot smoother, won’t they?

Yep yep. If I retort to everything this person says, it’d never end.

“Hmm!? Yuu-chan, you’re trying to ignore us, aren’t you! That’s not normal! However! We are still going to continue along with it! People like us are still not accepted by society, right? As the prototype, we’ll need to continue doing our best! Otherwise, there will be nobody after us!”

“.....”

Prototype, huh? I didn’t want for there to be more of people with a personality like yours.

Still, I will not retort back. Humans are creatures that learn.

“To tell you all the truth, Rikka’s been rather strange –”

“What!? DevTru Rikka-chan!? That DevTru Rikka-chan has been rather strange!? Tell us that sooner! Tell us hiderier¹⁵! We’ll be out for a bit!”

As the rainbow upperclassman dashed out of the clubroom at full force, her rainbow-coloured hair fluttered in the air. What speed! She was faster than the average member of the track and field club for sure. She definitely wasn’t normal!

Well, if I think of this as “someone who is likely to interrupt my consultation leaving”, then I guess her leaving could be considered me being lucky.

“As expected, Rainbow-senpai is still the same as ever-death. It feels like you can’t win against her-death,” said Dekomori as she repeatedly nodded her head in astonishment.

It truly is a mysterious allegiance. Even though it was that person’s fault that we were now pressed for time. In fact, when we gathered at the clubroom, she didn’t arrive normally either. I’ll omit the details though.

¹⁴ An untranslatable pun playing on the similarities of the kanji 早, which generally means fast/early, and 旱, which is Hideri-senpai’s given name.

¹⁵ Same pun as above.

Still, now that I think back on it, isn't it weird that I'm the one who's being blamed for what happened just now?

Well, whatever. It's fine.

"Deko-chan. Don't try to compete with that person, okay? You'll likely lose to her instantly~☆."

Shichimiya cut it smoothly, giving Dekomori advice on how to deal with Hideri-senpai.

It's been over half a year since Shichimiya had gotten acquainted with Hideri-senpai: it seemed that in that time, Shichimiya had learnt how to deal with her. I think that in that regard, Shichimiya was good with how she socialised with people.

Even to this day, Rikka still gets caught up in Hideri-senpai's pace. But since the person in question seemed to be having fun, I guess that wasn't really a problem.

"Anyway, for the time being, it would be fine if I just went ahead and started talking?"

As I said that, I looked in Kumin-senpai's direction.

Of course, needless to say, as expected, Kumin-senpai was, as per usual, sleeping.

That she even came made me very happy, as it was probably her way of showing me her kindness. I think!

I also think that she's showing no signs of comradery. Well, let's just chalk that up to her being a former member of the Eccentric Drama Club. When thinking of things like that, Dekomori – who, surprisingly, had listened to me properly – may just be a nice person after all. Though, there was also that important motivating factor – that it was for Rikka's sake – as for why she heard me out.

"Shichimiya, you've already met with Rikka, right?"

Leaving Kumin-senpai aside for now, I brought the conversation to Shichimiya.

The sole point of normality present, and the last bastion for my peace of mind.

"Ah, yeah. Her Devilish Truth Stare's gone, right? Well, perhaps that sort of thing just happens from time to time."

"Eh? That sort of thing just happens from time to time?"

"Doesn't it? I'm not a hundred percent sure of this though, since I don't have the Devilish Truth Stare. I mean, the specifics of something like this varies from individual to individual, right? For instance: nowadays, don't you also have days where you feel like you don't have any powers, Hero? And isn't it true that there are settings like 'my powers will disappear on days with a full moon'? Since each person has their own take on their powers – the possibilities are endless. Well, but I'll always be the Magical Demon Duchess though~☆. And so that's why I'm not particularly worried about Rikka-chan right now. That being said, if Rikka-chan seeks me for a consultation, I'll be giving it my all, of course."

“Hm... When you put things like that, it does feel it could be something along those lines.”

As expected of Shichimiya – what wise words.

Like usual, she had said something really cool. I wouldn't be able to say something like that.

“What do you think, Dekomori?”

“Since Dekomori has a permanent contract with Master, it is definitely not that sort of thing. Dekomori's contract with Master is still in effect even now-death!”

Emphasis was placed on the words, “still in effect”. I guess to Dekomori, that was what was most important to her.

Hm.

I thought over it for a while. Certainly, like Shichimiya had said, it could just very well be “something that happens from time to time” – I had no way of refuting that possibility. That in time, Rikka will be back to how she usually is – it's very possible for that to be the case.

Be that as it may, because of that disease of mine – my “prone to worrying” disease – I couldn't just leave things at that.

After all, for “something that happens from time to time” too – there must have been some kind of cause to trigger that line of thought in her.

“Certainly, like what Shichimiya has said, it's not like I too haven't had the ‘have-no-powers’ experience before. Still, *shouldn't there be some sort of cause for her to think like that?*”

“Hm. That's true, isn't it? I see, so you want to find out what that cause is, Hero. You can't just leave this alone.”

“Well, that more or less sums it up.”

“Since Dekomori wants to see Master return to being Master as soon as possible, Dekomori too thinks that we should determine the cause and resolve things quickly-death.”

It appeared that Dekomori was also of the same opinion as me.

“Nyahaha, it's not like that I had thought that we should leave this alone. I'm not that cold of a person~.”

Shichimiya made a troubled smile – as if she had she had done something bad. I've never thought of Shichimiya as a cold person though. Not even once. In fact, it was the exact opposite. Shichimiya's the kindest person I know.

“No no, I didn't think that of you at all.”

"Ah, well, how about we just focus on deduction from this point onwards, okay? Let's search for the cause. That being said, I have absolutely no idea on where to start. That's why, like what I had said before, I had wondered if it was just something that happened from time to time. Hero, do you have any ideas?"

"No, see, it's because I couldn't come up with anything myself that I wanted to consult everyone about this."

"Hah. Do you even pay attention to your own girlfriend-death? Break up-death."

Dekomori-san became scathing of me again all of a sudden.

Certainly, as I was indeed her boyfriend, I couldn't exactly scold her for saying something like that when something like this has happened. However, while it is embarrassing as an upperclassman to be getting riled up by their cute underclassman, I just had to give her my excuse, or rather, my rebuttal.

"But, isn't it the same for you, Dekomori? Despite being her servant, it seems that you have no idea why your Master ended up like this either, right?"

"Gepfft."

Dekomori's face was that of someone who had just been hit by an unexpected counterattack.

She continued to look extremely vexed as she bellowed back.

"U-ugh! No, I do know, it's Dark Flame Master's fault-death! Dark Flame Master is the cause-death! For sure-death!"

"Certainly, like Deko-chan says, the probability of Hero being the cause is quite high, isn't it?"

"Eh, seriously!?"

It's quite scary when it's coming from Shichimiya.

Of course, although I had not considered that possibility until now, for now I could safely conclude that the cause definitely wasn't something like me being unfaithful to Rikka. That was something I had sworn never to do.

"Nyahaha, you're way too flustered, Hero. Logically speaking, since Hero is the one who is closest to Rikka-chan, in terms of probability the chances of Hero being related to the cause is quite high. Then again, by the same logic, the possibility that Deko-chan's the cause is also quite high."

"Deko-!? But there's absolutely no way that Dekomori will ever do something that will bring harm to Master-death!"

"Then, for now, let's rule out the hypotheses that the two of you are the cause. Otherwise, this discussion is going to go nowhere. Hmm, are there any other —"

“Maybe the person she liked had said something like, ‘As for me, I prefer girls who don’t have things like abilities.’”

Interrupting Shichimiya, Kumin-senpai yawned a loud “Kumiiin” as she woke up and suddenly interjected with that.

That she had entered the conversation so abruptly (and so naturally, too) surprised me.

“Eh? Kumin-senpai, were you awake this entire time?”

As she rubbed her eyes, I asked the drowsy-looking Kumin-senpai that.

“Nope. I was asleep~. But, even when asleep, I could still properly hear the entire conversation. I’m the sleeping version of Prince Shoutoku¹⁶~.”

“.....”

The sleeping version, you say. I guess Kumin-senpai really is the most amazing ability user. But, more importantly... what Kumin-senpai had said just now had gotten me worried.

“By the way, about what you said just now – who is this ‘person she liked’?”

It was quite the disturbing phrase.

The person that Rikka liked – while I’m pretty sure that person’s me, I’ve never heard Kumin-senpai call me something like that before.

“Ah, when I said the person she liked, I was referring to her favourite baseball player. Ahaha, Yuu-chan, did you get jealous?”

“Ah, I see.”

I sighed a breath of relief.

Naturally, I had complete faith that Rikka hadn’t been cheating on me or anything, but still – I see, so that’s what it was. So it was your favourite player. Recently, thanks to Kumin-senpai, you’ve taken an interest to baseball, haven’t you, Rikka?

“At the stadium, Rikka would shout, ‘atsu-ooo!’¹⁷.”

“She shouted something like that...”

This was the first time I’ve heard of this.

¹⁶ A legendary regent who ruled Japan between 594-622 CE. He is most well-known for being the lay founder of Japanese Buddhism and establishing Japan’s *Seventeen-article Constitution*.

¹⁷ The nickname of Fukuoka SoftBank Hawk’s infielder, Matsuda Nobuhiro. Translated literally as “Fever Man” (熱男), it caught on as [Matsuda would pose and say “atsuoo” after a home run](#).

I was a little jealous. Wait no, it would be stupid of me to be jealous of her favourite baseball player.

"I see. Certainly, something like that could be the cause as well."

So interjected Shichimiya, returning the discussion back on topic.

The way she presided over the discussion was perfect. She was much better suited for this than I was.

"That's exactly right. If my favourite player had said 'I wonder if it's better for people not oversleep' then I too would stop sleeping. I will not sleep! I won't sleep... I won't!"

I won't sleep... probably – Kumin-senpai's voice slowly became weaker and weaker.

I was planning on voicing my relief since there was no way a baseball player would ever demand something like that, but those words of mine were sealed by Dekomori's next remarks.

"No, but, just now, Dekomori had also thrown a tantrum for tantrum's sake, yelling, "Return, abilities-death!" to Master, and yet it didn't do anything-death. If that theory was true, then Master should have listened and complied with Dekomori's request-death!"

"Indeed – while extreme, that certainly should have been the case if the theory was true."

Shichimiya nodded her head in agreement.

She then continued,

"It seems that at least this stage, the cause of Rikka-chan becoming like this is unknown. There's not enough information. While there's still the move of asking Rikka-chan about it directly, that would be putting the cart before the horse – there's no guarantee that she would return being her usual self."

After she said all that, she looked in my direction.

As she was looking at me, she smiled.

"If that's how things are, then rather than focusing on what the cause of it was, *shouldn't we be working to restore Rikka-chan back to her former self instead ☆?*"

"Well... That is the ultimate goal."

Since it seemed like Shichimiya wanted me to reply to her, I gave her a proper response.

"Okay, I got it. Nyahahaha, in that case, I have a plan."

"A plan?"

“That’s right, a plan to trick her back to her former self. Well then, I’m off to prepare! If anyone asks for my whereabouts, tell them that ‘I’ve returned to the demon world☆’ in a cute way☆.”

As she said all that, Shichimiya got up from her seat. She then waved goodbye as she left the clubroom.

Returning to the demon world – I wonder if that meant that she was heading home.

That would mean she was treating something like leaving school early as if it was no big deal though.

“Well, if Sofia-senpai has a plan, then the only thing left to do is to have faith in her-death. As even with Dekomori’s help, we couldn’t reach a solution-death. Dekomori’s fine with doing nothing-death, as long as Master is back to her usual self.”

Dekomori shrugged her shoulders as she said that.

Well, since I wasn’t able to come up with a concrete solution either, like Dekomori, I too had no choice but to pin my hopes on Shichimiya. I was curious as to what Kumin-senpai’s thoughts were about all this, and so I peaked in her direction – she was sleeping. I mean, I was expecting as much, but still. Not to mention the fact that our break ends in about a minute. Seriously, this was too much.

Sigh.

“Right. Let’s leave the rest to Shichimiya.”

“Death. In that case, let’s disband for now-death. ...What should we do about Siesta-senpai-death?”

“.....”

She was sound asleep. Sigh, it looks like I had no choice but to wake her up.

Meaning, I’m going to be late for my next class as well.

This is going to reflect poorly on me.

“Dekomori, you can head back to class first. Kumin-senpai’s hard to wake up.”

“No, Dekomori’s going to stay around to see what kind of prank Dark Flame Master will pull on Siesta-senpai-death.”

“I’m not going to do something like that!”

“Eh, you’re not-death!? But Rainbow-senpai does it every time-death?”

“...I knew it! Even so, I will not do it!”

“But, even Siesta-senpai seems to be saying ‘prank me’-death. Just now, Dekomori also wanted to scribble on Siesta-senpai’s sleeping face-death.”

“That’s... I mean, it’s not like I don’t get where you’re coming from, but...”

In fact, it was probably why Hideri-senpai did it.

The urge to scribble on that small face of hers – I would be lying if I said that I didn’t feel that urge at all.

“Hey, Dark Flame Master.”

It was unusual for Dekomori to have such a cute-sounding voice.

“Would you do it if Dekomori did it with you-death?”

“Would I do it... You mean scribble on Kumin-senpai?”

“Death. If we do it together – it would be our secret-death. In addition, with this ‘Automatically Erases After Five Minutes Permanent Marker’ made by the Dekomori Corporation we to scribble to our heart’s content-death!”

“Just what kind of company is the Dekomori Corporation!?”

Or rather: what even was the point of making such a product!?

Still, that marker – I wish I could give it to my little sister!

“Ge-heh-heh. A company of darkness – a black-market company-death.”

“.....”

Even if it was said with such a smug expression.

That I didn’t think that she was lying made her words quite scary.

“How about it-death?”

I deliberated over her proposal.

It certainly was a one-in-a-million chance for me to get rid of that – all the built-up “I want to scribble on her!” frustration – for sure. Wait, no – I’ve never had that kind of peculiar frustration before.

Even so, there was no way I was going to miss this chance!

“Alright, Dekomori. I’ve steeled myself.”

“Oh! Great-death! Now then! It’s super scribble time-deeeath!”

Chapter 4:

No, I didn't do it.

While I did say that I've steeled myself, never once did the words "I'll do it" come from my mouth.

Because I'm a rational human being.

I would never do such a horrible thing.

Although Dekomori, the person who tried to instigate me to be her accomplice, went wild, yelling "Deko Deko!", I somehow managed to calm her down. I then frantically tried to wake Kumin-senpai up.

However, when she woke up, the first thing that come from Kumin-senpai's mouth was, "I wouldn't have minded it, since I've grown used to it! In fact, come on¹⁸!"

Not only did it seem that she really could hear everything while asleep, it seemed that she had become used to being pranked.

In fact, come on, huh.

Just how many times had you been pranked until now – while I was curious, I was too scared of the answer to ask.

Anyhow, waking Kumin-senpai went without a hitch – was something I couldn't say, as I ended up coming to class five minutes late (it might have been because it was the second time, but Nibutani gave me a hard time. She said all sorts of things to me, like "At any rate, you were making out with Takanashi-san, right? Eh? I'll kill you." It was terrible). Which now brings us to the present.

It was the end of the third period – break time.

There had been no contact from Shichimiya yet.

Although I did say that I was leaving it to her, for me to *just leave everything to her* was, as expected, something that I just could not do.

With my anxiety reaching its peak (my "prone to worrying" disease), I headed over to Rikka's classroom – to class 2-2's classroom. In the small (or more accurately, minuscule) chance that the unexpected happens and that her powers had randomly started to return, there may have been something that I could do.

As her next class didn't require her to change rooms (I've already memorised Rikka's entire timetable), Rikka should be in her classroom.

¹⁸ Potential reference to baseball player Shohei Ohtani who will often shout, "Come on!" after landing a good hit against a strong pitcher or to encourage his team.

Rikka's seat was at the very front, next to the corridor, so –

"Ah, Yuuta. Is something up?"

Before I was able to enter class 2-2's classroom, Rikka called out to me.

It appeared that Rikka was by herself this break, earnestly preparing her materials for her next class inside the noisy classroom.

Usually, Fuurin-chan or Shichimiya would be with her, but those two were presently nowhere to be seen.

If I were to enter the classroom and look around – ah.

There sitting at the very back of the classroom was Fuurin-chan. The moment we saw each other, our eyes meet. Fuurin-chan smiled and waved at me; I returned her greetings with a small nod.

How rare. It seemed that today, she was handing Rikka over to me.

If it were like usual, she would have quarrelled with me as soon as I arrived, saying something like "Heeeeey, Rikka-chan's mine! No hogging!"

I mean hey, if she's not going to raise a fuss, that's fine with me.

"...How about it? Your powers, have they come back?"

"Nope. Not at all."

As she said that, Rikka shook her head cutely many times.

Ah, I'm being healed... I wonder I got worn out by last break something – after all, I had no time to refresh myself.

Oh, speaking of which.

I wonder what Hideri-senpai did last break?

"Yuuta Yuuta, listen. A short while ago, Arc-san was here. I'm not sure from when she knew, but it appeared that she had sensed what had happened to me, as she seemed to have come over for the purpose of telling me, 'You've become strange, haven't you! You're the same as us!'"

"...Really? In many different ways: that's very Hideri-senpai-like."

I feigned ignorance.

While it's true that what had happened with Rikka would have gotten leaked sooner or later, I still found it a little difficult to confess to Rikka that said leak came from me.

"But when I told her, 'Please don't say I'm the same as you,' Arc-san looked a little shocked and left immediately ..."

How unusual: it seems that Rikka had refuted Hideri-senpai.

Though, I could understand why she'd want to refute Hideri-senpai.

I wouldn't want to be thought of as being the same as that person either.

"Ah, but in case she took my words to mean something bad, I quickly sent her a text which said, 'Meaning, Arc-san is a one-of-a-kind existence in this world.'"

"...Did you get a reply?"

"Yep!"

And with that "Yep!", Rikka showed me the screen of her smartphone (at last, Rikka had got with the times! As for me, even until the end of mankind, I refuse to get swept up by this trend!).

The only thing on her screen was "🤗".

"... I see."

Before I saw that, I had imagined that Hideri-senpai had given Rikka a proper reply, but it seems that she had given vague reply instead.

I mean, what does that even mean, 🤗!

It was a big mystery to me. Did it mean that she was happy? That she was sad? Or that she had understood? Well, even if I kept thinking about it, I probably wouldn't figure it out, so I guess I had no choice but to ask my rainbow-haired upperclassman about it the next time I see her.

"So, Yuuta – is something up? Did you need me for anything? Did you forget your textbooks for something?"

"Eh? Ah..."

Although I came here without thinking because I was worried about her, if I were to be frank and tell her that, it would probably cause Rikka to grow worried as well. Given that I didn't want to worry Rikka, there was no way I could tell her the truth.

I needed to change the topic to something different – ah.

"Hey, um, have you ever been told something along the lines of 'I prefer girls who don't have things like abilities'?"

When I asked her that, Rikka looked at me blankly.

"? By who? You, Yuuta?"

"No, I'd never say something like that. To anyone. Ever."

I'm embarrassed of my jealousy.

I couldn't help but be bothered by that possibility.

No, but, I mean, the possibility of that being the case was not zero.

After all, there are people who imitate their favourite artists out of admiration, right? Furthermore, it could very well be said that being easily influenced by others is one of the many symptoms of chuunibyou. Since it was a possibility, I had to confirm it – was the excuse I gave myself.

“Hmm, I don’t think I’ve ever been told something like that?”

“I see. If that’s the case, then it’s fine. I was just a little worried that there might have been someone who had said such a something *terrible* thing to you.”

“Nope, there’s been nothing like that. Thank you for worrying, Yuuta.”

...Since I didn’t have the purest of motives when I asked her that, her thanking me made me feel a little guilty.

Nonetheless, I guess it could be said that asking Rikka about that possibility had resulted in me being able to reject one of the potential causes.

Anything that could have been the cause, I wanted to go through one by one.

The other thing that comes to mind is – hmm.

Actually, to tell the truth, I had spent the entire class just now thinking about it.

What Shichimiya had said earlier – that it was “just something that happens from time to time” – I kept mulling over it during class.

Certainly, it is true that there are times where I too feel a little under the weather.

It’s impossible for anyone to stay exactly the same at all times. Whenever Kumin-senpai’s excited and talking about baseball, she would often say something along the lines of “Right now, they’re only doing poorly because they’re not feeling well. Sooner or later, their performance will improve.”

So, in other words, what did Rikka need for her condition to improve – what did the Devilish Truth Stare need?

Power, magic... ah.

And so I remembered.

The other day, Rikka asked for me to replenish her magic.

That request – maybe that was an omen of things to come.

It’s not like I particularly wanted to replenish magic or anything like that, okay!

“Rikka. I, I was just thinking – could it be that the Devilish Truth Stare disappeared because you felt like you didn’t have enough magic...?”

“Hm? Perhaps? Maybe I am out of magic?”

“W-well then. I’ll replenish your magic with mine...? Look, the other day –”

“Wha—!? Huh!?”

Rikka’s face reddened rapidly.

It was rare for Rikka to be both red in the face and flustered at the same time. How precious. I’ll save this image of her deep within my brain.

“R-right! Thank you for offering! But, now’s no good!”

Rikka pushed both her hands out towards me, rejecting my offer.

What a shock!!

“Ah, ah, that’s right! I, there’s a little something I needed to do with Fuurin! Sorry! I’ll talk to you later!”

And with that, Rikka flew over to Fuurin-chan’s side in a flash.

Hmm.

I was at a loss as to why she had disappeared on me like this.

Maybe it wasn’t the proper time nor place for me to have said something like that.

Still, I felt a small ray of hope from her response.

Up until now, whenever I had asked her about the cause, she consistently responded with “I’m not sure”. This time, however, her response was a little different.

Looks like it may be magic related after all.

Was this a small step forward, I wonder?

And so, while thinking about what could be done next, I returned to my classroom ahead of time to ensure that I wouldn’t be late for my next class.

Chapter 5: A New Power! The Dark Flame Master Resurrected!

"I see. It could be that she's out of magic. Looks like Rikka-chan has still got ways to go. But, well, that's still in line with my conjecture. Rikka-chan's current 'no abilities' state – I'm guessing it's because her powers have been forcibly sealed away."

Lunch time.

As I was about to eat my lunch, I was called to the clubroom by Shichimiya, who had returned from the demon world.

Because I thought it would serve as a hint for her, when we rendezvoused at the clubroom, I summarised to Shichimiya what had happened during her return to the demon world. After hearing my summary, Shichimiya said all that in reply.

Forcibly, huh?

"So, someone had said or done something to her after all?"

"I don't know about that. While it could have been 'someone', it could have also been her 'environment', or even 'herself'. Regardless, I have no doubt that 'something' had sealed her powers away."

"Something?"

"But, well, it doesn't really matter what that something was☆. The only thing that matters is *if we can restore Rikka-chan back to her former self*, right☆? And so, here."

As Shichimiya said that, she handed a black sports bag over to me.

"Ah, I don't need the bag back. It's the one I used at my previous school, so I don't really care about it. Look, more importantly, check what's inside the bag☆."

"O-oh."

I checked the contents of the bag as instructed.

Inside was – a black... costume?

"E-err? What's this?"

"The time has come, Hero! It's time for you to return to being the Dark Flame Master – no, from here on out, you're the Super Dark Flame Master☆."

"Super Dark Flame Master!?"

"You shouldn't be surprised, Hero. It's convention for a hero who has lost their powers to merge with a new power and attain a super form."

"T-that certainly is something you hear quite often, but..."

In fact, it was my favourite trope.

It is the trope when thinking of combining mechas¹⁹, I wanted to shout.

“And that – that is something I made in case the time came for Hero to attain a new power!”

“A new... power.”

“Rikka-chan powers have been sealed thanks to the effect of ‘something’. If so, Hero! There’s only one thing left for us to do, right? We have to break the seal on Rikka-chan’s powers. And so, to gain the strength to break that seal – it is for this reason that the Super Dark Flame Master attained his new power☆. Becoming the Super Dark Flame Master and breaking the seal on Rikka-chan – this, I believe, is a task that only Hero can do.”

“I, I see.”

Given how emphatic she was, I couldn’t help but nod along to Shichimiya’s strange theory.

Certainly, with a name like the Super Dark Flame Master, I can see how me doing this sort of thing might help with Rikka regaining her powers.

The cause would still be unknown, but if I were to return to how I was in the old days – the possibility of Rikka getting inspired and returning to her former self was not zero.

In fact, wasn’t the chance of success quite high?

Here too, Kumin-senpai would probably say something like, “Since the pitcher’s pitching well, the fielders will be motivated to also play well.” Maybe it’s because her favourite baseball team had won the championships or something, but recently, whenever I think of Kumin-senpai, for some strange reason the only thing that comes to mind is her saying something baseball-related.

“Well, but it’s okay if this strategy fails☆. Because –”

Because even if this fails, with what I’ve got planned next, Rikka-chan’s powers should return, Shichimiya said with a smile.

Yes, that’s absolutely right.

That mentality is so Shichimiya-like.

Anything one does will cause something to happen – was it?

¹⁹ A cultural joke mostly lost in translation. In the original text, Yuuta talks about グレート合体 (literally as “great combination”), the trope in mecha anime where a “main” robot combines with other robots to attain a super form. As this trope entered the Japanese mainstream mainly thanks to the toy line/anime franchise [Brave Series \(勇者シリーズ\)](#), the joke here is that it is funny for Yuuta’s favourite trope to come from a franchise called the Brave Series (another way of translating Shichimiya’s nickname for Yuuta, 勇者, is Brave).

Back when we were middle schoolers, Shichimiya said that quite often. She probably holds the same ethos even now. I too should learn to adopt that mentality.

“Besides, we have powerful allies *now*, right☆?”

As soon as Shichimiya said that, the door to the clubroom slammed open.

I wasn’t sure if this was something Shichimiya had suggested they do or if this was something they simply wanted to do (it was probably the latter), but regardless, the way they entered was that of an entertainer.

It wasn’t normal!

“Yuu-chan! Naturally, we too will become your strength! Because, becoming your strength – that looks to be something very interesting!”

“Right right. This is serious! Because Rikka-chan’s our important cute little underclassman! And in times of need, we need to help each other! Moreover, if Rikka-chan’s not feeling well, then we might not be able to go see a baseball game together!”

As they made their dramatic entrances, my two upperclassmen went and took my hand as if to encourage me.

And then, coming in late after those two was –

“Hmph. Let Dekomori make this clear: Dekomori is not here to cooperate with the Dark Flame Master-death. Dekomori by herself is powerful-death. Dekomori’s just making sure that Dekomori is able to restore Master back to her former self-death.”

Saying such cute lines with a disgruntled face was my one and only underclassman.

Dekomori didn’t take my hand, however.

Ah, jeez – I thought to myself.

I was a little moved by everyone’s kind words.

Everyone was really worried about Rikka – it made me happy, knowing that they all felt the same way as me.

“So, what kind of powers do us as a group need for DevTru Rikka-chan to gain her abilities back, Yuu-chan!? No, Super Dark Flame Master!!! Give us your orders!”

Continuing to hold my hand, Hideri-senpai got closer and closer to my face as she domineeringly said all that.

Too close, you’re too close.

“You can order me too! Super Dark Flame Master-san!!! I’m fine with something like the power of baseball!”

In addition, and similar to Hideri-senpai, Kumin-senpai also moved closer and closer to my face as she domineeringly said all that.

Seriously, you're both too close.

I can feel myself blushing.

"U-umm, hold on please."

I took a step back.

Although hearing that from the two of them made me really happy, I didn't have the sort of power that they were thinking of – no, wrong. That's not what I should be thinking. I will become the Super Dark Flame Master.

"Okay."

Separating from my upperclassmen, I clad myself in the new power that I had received from Shichimiya.

Ah, how nostalgic.

Jet black clothing. Jet black boots. Jet black gloves. Jet black mantle.

Yes, this – this is Super Dark Flame Master!!!

Oh god.

Although I had said all that in my mind, I was still super embarrassed. This is too much. The old me was too unbelievable, oi. This is way too dark. And way too black. And way too noir²⁰. Slightly unrelated, but don't black companies²¹ sound cool when you call them noir companies!?

But, although it's embarrassing.

Everyone's gone this far to encourage me.

That's why, I'll become the Super Dark Flame Master. For them.

And, because I'm worried about Rikka.

If it's to return her back to her past self – I'm willing to do anything!!!

"Hah. Super Dark Flame Master is my name. Let Super Dark Flame Master be the one to grant you girls strength. The powers I –"

"Ah, Dekomori has no need for that-death."

"Don't interrupt!"

²⁰ Even though it makes no sense in English (given noir is used contemporarily in English to refer to the genre noir, I've left the noir here for the joke in the following line to work (if you're not aware, noir is the French word for black).

²¹ Black company is a Japanese term for workplaces that exploit (usually young) employees by forcing them to work large amounts of overtime without pay.

After I had gone through all this effort to resolve myself!

It was hard to work myself up for this... Could this be Super Mode's drawback!?

Hmm, I can feel my thinking becoming more and more chuuni-ish.

Go! Become even more chuuni-ish, my thoughts!

"Super Dark Flame Master! Make ours is a special one!"

"Make mine baseball-related!"

Hideri-senapi aside, what does a baseball-related power even look like!?

They were all nothing but selfish people.

Well, it's not like there's anything I could do about that.

"Leave it to me. Nothing is impossible for the Super Dark Flame Master. Power has been granted. Follow my orders. The powers I –"

Come to think of it.

There was one person who had been strangely quiet this whole time, wasn't there? And so, I found myself looking in Shichimiya's direction.

I had never seen Shichimiya grin so broadly before.

I felt like I was being tricked.

Chapter 6: The Unveiling of All Our Abilities SHOW!!!

And so, after school – we waited for Rikka to arrive at the clubroom alone.

Meaning, we had taken used all sorts of measures to trick Rikka.

Because we more or less had club activities daily (the people around us probably wonder what the heck our club activities are. And to be honest, I wondered that too. However, according to Hideri-senpai, our club activities are “to do something that’s special!”), it was only a matter of time before Rikka showed up to the clubroom. We only had up until that time to come up with and refine a strategy that Rikka would not catch wind of until she arrived.

And so, the strategy we had decided on was the “The Unveiling of All Our Abilities SHOW!!!”.

The strategy was very simple and straightforward: each person was to unveil their newly acquired power one by one, hopefully inspiring Rikka to regain her abilities. It could be said that this was the method of regaining her powers was not only one of the simplest methods but also one of the methods that would make Rikka the happiest.

While there was also the plan to show off everyone’s abilities all at once, as there existed that one person who had no links to common sense and was as hard to manage as a runaway train, that plan was ruled out by Shichimiya.

And since the person in question was also very eager, stating, “We’re the best at bringing things to an end, so leave it to us!”, us showing off our abilities all at once was probably out of the question. Still, I did have some unease over how reckless and nonsensical the person going first was – her being selected to go first raised some question marks in my mind. However, since our order was decided using Rock Papper Scissors, there wasn’t much I could do about it.

I couldn’t say that our strategy was flawless, but –

“Oi. As long as we’re here, the strategy flawless, isn’t it! That opinion is not normal!”

The heck? For Hideri-senpai to say that: it was like she had read my mind.

“It’s thanks to the effects of the special ability we’ve received from the Super Dark Flame Master, ‘Seventh Seven’, right? Because we’re now special even among the special – we know all.”

“.....”

No, but I haven’t given you anything...

I reminisced about what had happened.



“Now then, I shall confer you all powers – by my command, Amaniji Hideri –”

“Ah, ack, i-it’s, it’s here!!! Super Dark Flame Master...!!!”

“No, I’ve still yet to –”

“Huff, huff.... So this is our special power – ‘Seventh Seven’. Heh heh heh, as soon as it came into our possession, we understood everything about this power.”

“.....”

“This power, it’s – it’s a one-of-a-kind unprecedentedly special superhuman power. In other words, it’s an ability that’s rare even among the rare abilities. Ahaha, there could not be a more ideal exceptionally special ability for us!!!”

“...Um. What kind of ability is it?”

Contrary with what was meant to happen, I was the one enquiring about her ability.

No, I had no intention of giving her an ability like this. This ability that she had was something she had made up of her own accord after getting excited.

“...This isn’t good. It’s only by a little, but we seem to have surpassed the Super Dark Flame Master!!! This surely must be the result of our distinctiveness being set free – heh heh heh, even our hair is shining in the seven prismatic colours!!! We’re literally a human whose hair’s peculiarly coloured!!!”

Hideri-senpai replied conceitedly as she responded to my query.

However, she didn’t answer my question at all. Not even one bit. Furthermore, her hair had always been rainbow coloured. Don’t phase it as if your hair had suddenly changed colours, Hideri-senpai.

If you really had an ability like changing the colour of your hair, it’d be nice if you could share that ability with me as soon as possible.

“Ha, hahahahaha! So this is our special power!!! If it’s this, then we can rescue DevTru Rikka-chan!!! Just hold on, we’re coming to help!!!”

...Was this really okay?

Well, the person in question seemed to be enjoying herself, so I guess it’s fine.

“...Our ability, would you like to see it?”

“...I’m good.”

I declined her offer.

After all, she’d be revealing her ability soon anyway. Then again, I didn’t really mind if I didn’t know what her ability was.



End of reminiscence.

Sigh.

Regardless, for now I'll send Hideri-senpai my support.

"...Good luck, I'm counting on you."

"Heh heh. Just leave it to us! Well then, be on special standby!"

After having said all that, Hideri-senpai moved from the waiting room to the clubroom (principal's office).

The four of us who remained – Shichimiya, Dekomori, Kumin-senpai (currently asleep), and I – remained on standby in the waiting room adjacent to the principal's office in the form of watching the monitor that was in the room.

A form remaining on standby that made free use of the power of the Dekomori Corporation.

In a blink of an eye, Dekomori's bodyguards installed everything necessary for surveillance, such as surveillance cameras and a monitoring device.

Normal's amazing!

Wait no, this isn't normal!

"So, is there anything that we should be doing here to help-death?"

Dekomori directed that question at me. Come to think of it, what were we doing waiting here?

Since the plan came entirely from Shichimiya this time, I shifted my gaze to Shichimiya. Noticing that I was looking at her, Shichimiya gave a swift reply. A big difference from a certain someone.

"No, see, there's a reason why we're going in one at a time. We still have very little information on why Rikka-chan lost her abilities in the first place. And so, we need to collect more information. And the best way for us to do that is for us to observe her. Just as Hero did this morning, where he got made fun of for having his eye on Rikka-chan the entire time."

"How did you –!?"

Although it was a joint class, didn't Shichimiya choose to do creative dance for PE? She shouldn't have been present!

She was making fun of me over what I had done this morning – even though she shouldn't have seen it happen.

"Nyahaha, it's because I understand how Hero will likely act. The Hero and the Demon Duchess have an unbreakable connection with one another because there is an inseparable

relationship between the two. That's why, I know how you'll act thanks to my ability –
Resonance Belzethia
 Demon Duchess × Hero☆.”

“An ability with a name that doesn't sound very Shichimiya-ish!?”

“Nyahaha, it's because I thought that this sort of name for the ability would be to Hero's taste. Since it's a very Rikka-chan like name.”

“No... What the ability is called is something I don't really have any strong opinions about...”

Was this something that she cared about...? Still, I did quite like Shichimiya's rather simple ability names.

“Hm, understood-death. So the relationship between the two you is like the relationship between two people who are having an affair-death?”

“How did you end up interpreting it like that!”

I got angry. Unusually angry.

It really set me off, what Dekomori had said. Things like having an affair and infidelity, I absolutely will not tolerate. That in general, men are creatures who cheat on their partners? The hell, who would feel like doing something like that. I would never have an affair! Having an affair is something that a human should never do.

“Dark Flame Master... Dekomori's never seen you so fired up before-death. Don't tell Dekomori you cheated because you could not forgive Master for cheating on you with Dekomori-death?”

“No, I have never cheated on Rikka, and moreover, Rikka would never do something like cheat on me...”

“Then, you're saying that the relationship between Dekomori and Master was one where she just played around with me-death!?”

“What a misleading way of phrasing it! Just say the two of you are friends!”

“Um, you two, I'm sorry to interrupt while the two of you are in the midst of having so much fun, but Rikka-chan's here.”

At Shichimiya's prompting, Dekomori and I hurriedly shifted our gaze towards the monitor.

Rikka had just entered the clubroom.

As for Hideri-senpai – she was sitting with on the principal's desk, looking all self-important with her legs crossed. And for some reason, she had made it dark in the clubroom.

Her hair was rainbow coloured.

Well.

Show me what you have planned, Hideri-senpai.



With the monitor on the desk that Dekomori's bodyguards had prepared for us, the three of us observed Hideri-senpai and Rikka.

Since Dekomori's bodyguards were only able to prepare one monitor (it seemed that they were ill-prepared for this. Don't get me wrong through, it was amazing that they were able to get this much arranged for us, so there's no complaints from me), the three of us had to squeeze tightly together for us to all see the screen.

The monitor displayed a bird's eye view of Rikka and Hideri-senpai in the clubroom.

"Huh? Is it just Arc-san? Where's everyone else?"

Even if it's not always a full house when we gather, there is always that one sleeping person present. On top of that, by now, someone else should have arrived at the clubroom. It seemed that Rikka felt that something was out of place: her eyes kept darting around the clubroom restlessly.

"There no Siesta-senpai...! She's not here sleeping...! Impossible...!"

"Indeed. Right now, it's a special time for just the two of us, DevTru Rikka-chan."

I had no idea why she did so, but Hideri-senpai grinned as she began to talk. Somehow, it felt like there was some sort of shadow attached to her words.

I wonder if this was her ability... A first-rate ability in creating a mood of melancholy... It pains me to say it, but I did find it kind of cool.

Well, it's not like there's any point asking this person about what her intent was.

It may very well be the case that there was no meaning behind it. In fact, I'm almost 100% certain that there was no meaning behind it.

It seemed that Rikka too seemed cautious of such a Hideri-senpai: there was no sign of Rikka wanting to close the door of the clubroom at all. Or maybe Rikka just forgot to do it.

Either way.

Great, she had a good sense of danger.

She's ready to flee at a moment's notice from this dangerous upperclassman.

"DevTru Rikka-chan, please hear us out. It seems that we have finally awakened. Awakened to our ability!!!"

Rikka reacted to those words with a jolt.

Awakened. Ability.

Although she may have lost her powers, Rikka was still an ability user. It appeared that she couldn't help but react to those words. Such was the fate – or rather, curse – of an ability user.

It's quite a real possibility for Hideri-senpai to restore Rikka back to her former self all by herself – as I thought that, a little both of both hope and sorrow swelled up within me. I – that was just how I felt about it.

"Congratulations! What kind of ability did you awaken to?"

"...We will tell you specially. Our special power – 'Seventh Seven. Or, 7th VII!!!"

Seventh Seven
"7th VII...!"

Rikka was visibly stunned.

I had absolutely no idea why Rikka was stunned. Dekomori didn't seem to have any idea either: when I turned to look at her, she had a "?" sort of look on her face. Shichimiya, on the other hand, said, Seventh Seven "Ho. 7th VII," as if she understood what Seventh Seven was.

Hmm, I wonder if this was due to our differing schools of thoughts regarding abilities.

Rikka and Shichimiya belong to the all-rounder faction.

Surprisingly, Dekomori and I seem to be of the same faction.

But back to the monitor. On the screen, Rikka drew back.

I'd like to believe that Rikka was getting ready to run away.

"Seventh Seven is the ability to govern special: meaning, we can see through the reasons behind abnormal situations – and DevTru Rikka-chan's current unusual state – quite easily. 'I have no abilities right now: I'm at a disadvantage. Should I escape?' is what you're thinking right now, correct?"

"Ugh...!"

With the scenario that Hideri-senpai crafted, anyone could have guessed that Rikka wanted to flee. And yet, when she was told that by Hideri-senpai, Rikka froze.

Was this another one of ill effects of losing the Devilish Truth Stare...?

"And there's more!!! DevTru Rikka-chan's special thoughts – we know all about it!!!"

"M-my special thoughts?"

"We'll go with this for starters. No, maybe we'll go with this? 'Everyone in the club has a really good figure, don't they? Ugh, I've grown fatter recently, haven't I... Yuuta's fried rice is just too delicious –'"

"Ah, AHH! Stop, STOP!"

It was Rikka's rarely heard raised voice.

And, along with raising her voice, Rikka vigorously closed the door of the clubroom that she previously had shown no intention of closing. I guess she didn't want anyone else to hear what Hideri-senpai was saying. How cute.

"As expected of your ability! Um... Don't tell anyone please...!"

"It's because we won't tell anyone that the special thoughts are special!!!"

...That sure is a great thing to say, but it's complete nonsense: we can hear everything the two of you are saying!

Nevertheless... So that was what you were thinking, Rikka...

There was no need for you to worry, however: I could love even 100 kilos of Rikka. And, the reason behind the healthy meals I've been making for you recently is because I'm worried about your health.

"No, Dark Flame Master. Dekomori was wondering what had happened-death: turns out it was Dark Flame Master's fault after all-death. Dekomori does not want a chubby Master, so Dekomori would like for you to put Master on a proper diet-death."

With a sullen look on her face, Dekomori blamed me.

Hmm... Even if you say that...

"Or rather... it's not just me: you're quite harsh on your Master as well..."

"You're wrong: Dekomori wants Master to be on a proper diet precisely because Dekomori respects Master-death. After all, it's only natural for a person to want their target of respect to constantly be beautiful-death. Dekomori wouldn't care if Dark Flame Master became Chubby Flame Master-death."

"Hm. I see. You do have a point. I'll see what I can do."

"...The two of you are actually quite close with each other, aren't you? I'm a little jealous."

"No, that's not the case at all." "No, that's not the case at all-death."

Dekomori and I unintentionally spoke in sync.

"Nyahaha, see," said Shichimiya with a bitter smile.

No, seriously, it's not like that at all. Well, it is true that Dekomori's easy for me to talk to. However, she only feels like an important underclassman to me.

"But if I had to be honest, you're the person who I'm the closest to, Shichimiya."

Rikka is the person who's special to me. But.

Compared to Dekomori, I trust Shichimiya so much that it's not even comparable. If someone asked me who my best friend was, I would answer that it was Shichimiya in a heartbeat.

"Nya!? H-Hero, what's with all this all of a sudden!?"

"What do you mean, I'm just telling you that you're unmistakably the person who I am closest to –"

"Ah, is this an affair-death? Dekomori's telling Master-death!"

"Quit it!"

Grr.

Something like that wasn't the case at all.

Either way, we shouldn't be having this conversation right now. We should be paying attention to the monitor.

"Ah, Hideri-senpai seems to be moving for some reason."

In response to my words, Shichimiya and Dekomori brought their attention back to the monitor.

"With this special power of ours, we also know plenty of other special thoughts that you had, DevTru Rikka-chan. Heh heh – naturally, we have information on all the other club members too. Would you like to hear their special thoughts?"

"I-I'm good..."

Rikka answered with a trembling voice.

Rikka seemed to be frightened of – no, to be honest, that ability scared me too. Dekomori, who was beside me, had a similar reaction: she turned pale and let out an "Eep-death". As for Shichimiya... she appeared fine. As expected of Shichimiya.

"U-um... this, is this a punishment for being late to club activities...? I was late today because of a little cleaning –"

"No way, no way. We would never subject you to a punishment or anything. We want you to experience special. When someone is late, it's because there was some special reason, because something irregular had happened – it's something that's outside one's control, right?"

"Uh... Ah, right."

"The world is brimming over with special!!!"

Hideri-senpai put force behind that assertion.

That everyone and everything is special – it came across to me that she just wanted to say something along those lines. I mean, it was a cool line.

Still, it doesn't feel convincing at all when it's said by a rainbow-haired upperclassman.

"Now then, let's move on to the main topic of this conversation."

"The... main topic? It's not about the unveiling of your power?"

"It is about the disappearance of DevTru Rikka-chan's powers."

"Eh? Me?"

"That's right," said Hideri-senpai as she finally got up from the desk.

Her movements felt bizarre – is this another one of Seventh Seven's powers? Even though the movement in question was just Hideri-senpai moving up to Rikka's face slowly. Even though I was viewing it through a screen, I still felt intimidated...?

Rikka too appeared to be pressured by that bizarreness: Rikka was frozen stiff. It looked like Rikka was standing at attention, confronting Hideri-senpai face-to-face.

"As for why we awakened to this special power of ours, and why it awakened only now – Seventh Seven has specially informed us. This power – for the use of restoring DevTru Rikka-chan's specialness, this power was born."

"My... specialness."

"That's right. And now, we will get that specialness back. We will show you how."

As she said that.

Hideri-senpai embraced Rikka strongly – and kissed her.

"Huh!?" "Wha-death!?"

"No, Hero and Deko-chan... I can't see..."

The instant we saw that scene, Dekomori and I both leaned forward and stared at the monitor intensely.

We paid no attention to Shichimiya.

"Nonono, this rainbow-haired upperclassman – just what are you doing!!!"

"Death-death!!! She must be stopped now-death!!! Oi!!! Get a move on, Dark Flame Master!!!"

"Right!!!"

The two of us tried to storm the clubroom. However, we were stopped by Shichimiya.

"Hey hey, you guys. Have the two of you forgotten what our purpose is? That we're trying to help Rikka-chan regain her powers? Are the two of you trying to interrupt something that's being done for the sake of helping Rikka-chan regain her powers? She hasn't crossed the line with her actions yet, has she?"

“No, well...” “No, well-death...”

...That certainly was true.

Hideri-senpai, in her own Hideri-senpai way of thinking, must have done what she did for Rikka’s sake, so stopping her would be a violation of the rules we had set. Even if what she did made it seem as if she had rainbow for brains, her kissing Rikka must have been what Hideri-senpai thought was best to do.

With our heads hung in shame, Dekomori and I headed back to our places in front of the monitor.

As expected, the kiss scene was over.

“So? Has your power returned?” asked Hideri-senpai triumphantly. She seemed to have also dropped the shadow from her words.

In a daze from what seemed to be shock, Rikka,

“...I was kissed. It felt soft.”

answered like so.

She simply gave a status report – a personal recount of what had just happened.

“Ah, um... My power... has not returned. Sorry.”

“Hm. Guess this was beyond us. Maybe we weren’t the right person for this. Well, since we were able to do something unusual with DevTru Rikka-chan, it was still a good outcome. By the way, in terms of the people who have kissed you, what number are we?”

“E-err... Number four?”

Rikka’s face reddened in embarrassment as she gave that answer.

Hey hey, to be so frank about something like that is – number four!?

It goes without saying who one of those people were. And I just watched Hideri-senpai kiss her. And so, the remaining two – who!?

“Yep, it’s Dekomori-death.”

“You!!!”

“The fact that Dark Flame Master has done it when Dekomori hasn’t was unfair-death. And because Master normally refuses, Dekomori used the pretext of a punishment game to do it-death. Well, it was over cling wrap-death. Gehehe, Dekomori’s the only one to have kissed her like that-death!!!”

“.....”

It was pathetic enough that Rikka had rejected her request to kiss her, but for it to be over cling wrap as well is just – was something that, as expected, I could not say.

However, the mental image of Dekomori kissing Rikka through cling wrap made a certain thought rise to the forefront of my mind.

Turn Dekomori kissing Rikka through cling wrap into a bromide²², please. And please make said bromide available for purchase at convenience stores.

Well, I'm not that much of a brute. It's only one kiss: I guess things like this occasionally happens. And it was with cling wrap as well, as I guess you could say that it doesn't really count.

However, that still leaves one person unexplained. Could it possibly be Fuurin-chan? She's always saying things like "Oh my, Rikka-chan's so cute, right?" to me. Which I wholeheartedly agreed with.

If it was Fuurin-chan, I can rest easy. That's why, Fuurin-chan – anything more than that, I won't say.

Please let it be Fuurin-chan!!!

"Hero... Your thoughts are leaking..."

"Ah. Sorry about that... How embarrassing..."

"Nyahaha, it's not me, so it could possibly be Fuurin-chan. Are you jealous of the fact that Rikka-chan's kissed a lot of people? Do you want to kiss me to even it up, Hero?"

With an extremely calm expression on her face, Shichimiya said all that as if it were no big deal.

Since she doesn't usually make those types of jokes, I felt a bit uncomfortable – or more accurately, I was quite taken aback – by what Shichimiya said.

"Nyahaha, it was a joke, a joke. Revenge for before. I know that Hero's not the kind of Hero who would do something like that★!"

"No, I mean, that's true, but..."

"Dekomori doesn't mind-death, you can do it here. Dekomori will simply make sure to report to Master that you are having an affair-death! Isn't that right, Dark Affair Master!"

"Certainly, if you really stretch it, you could link flame with affair, but who are you calling an affair master? Don't give me such a detestable name."

Just how set are you on making me an adulterous character?

I would never do such a thing. I'd rather die than be unfaithful.

As we carried out such an exchange, there had been movement on the monitor.

²² In Japan, a bromide refers to a category of commercial photographic portraits of celebrities.

We had only taken our eyes off the monitor for a short while. In that time, however, Hideri-senpai's figure had disappeared. There was only the lone figure of Rikka sitting in the clubroom on the screen.

Huh... Where on earth did that person go?

"Behind you guys."

"Argh!?" "Argh!?" "Argh!?"

The three of us all got surprised at the same time. Before we knew it, Hideri-senpai was right behind us.

Seriously, I had no idea when she got there.

"It's Seventh Seven's power – is what we wish we could say, but the three of you were chatting away so happily that we came in normally. Ah, no, that was a lie, we came in feeling abnormally!"

Hideri-senpai glossed over that strange thing she had said.

For Hideri-senpai to make a gaffe and say that she came in "normally": we must have been chatting up quite the storm. That is something to reflect on.

But more importantly.

"Or rather, what the heck were you doing, Hideri-senpai!? Oi, don't go laying your hands on someone's girlfriend!"

"Death-death! Only her servants have the privilege of kissing Master-death!"

How rare. Dekomori was backing me up for once.

Since she had only done it through cling wrap, I'm guessing that she must have been angry that Hideri-senpai had kissed Rikka directly on her lips before her.

In the face of our voices of criticism, Hideri-senpai, in a devil-may-care attitude,

"No, see, we thought that maybe, chuunibyou was a disease that was related to kissing. And so, we had no choice but to kiss her, right?"

answered like so with a grin.

"That's a lie!!! This was a premediated crime!!!"

"A premediated crime? We're calling the language misuse police! Hey, language misuse police~!"

"Grr, misusing language-death! To say that it was an intentional crime-death!"

"What's with this turn of events!?"

All of a sudden, I'm the one at fault!

It wasn't the case that Dekomori was, for some strange reason, on my side! It was a trap!

We got completely swept up by Hideri-senpai's pace, didn't we?

"And so that's why we had mistakenly made kissing DevTru Rikka-chan our task. Sorry, we boasted that it would end with us, and yet..."

As she said all that, she sat languidly not next to us (granted, there wasn't much space to sit near us) but on the sofa that Kumin-senpai was sleeping on (although there was enough space for one more person to sit opposite to where she had chosen to sit, for some reason she still chose to sit there).

It appears that she had no intention of observing the person going next with us.

As for the matter of Hideri-senpai kissing Rikka – there's nothing I can do about it now. It's already happened.

Guess I have no choice but to leave things at that.

"This was the first time we used our power, so we're tired."

"So even Hideri-senpai gets tired..."

"Of course we get tired: it is us after all. Besides, schemes are naturally tiring. Especially since we went to all that trouble to add a shadow to our words – it wore us out."

"Then why did you even bother..."

"Hmph, because that is our *raison d'être*! Well, it wasn't as tiring as setting our hair like this."

"That certainly is true!"

It is coloured like the rainbow after all. This is a bit late, but I wonder how she dyed her hair to get it like that?

Still, what was the point behind putting in all that effort in her hair for...

Well, there likely wasn't a point. It was a simple rationale like "to do something a little special!" for sure. But, for her to have really done it – I felt exhausted even thinking about it.

In that regard, I strongly feel that Hideri-senpai's not normal – that she's not ordinary.

To be honest, that part of her charms me.

And although it ashamed me to admit it.

I was, quite frankly, in awe of that part of her.

"We're exhausted – that's why we're passing on the baton! Best of luck, Kumin."

As Hideri-senpai told the sleeping Kumin-senpai that, Kumin-senpai forced herself up.

For some reason, when Hideri-senpai tells Kumin-senpai to wake up, Kumin-senpai responds instantly. In contrast, when the rest of us try to get Kumin-senpai to wake up, Kumin-senpai responds sluggishly.

Such was Kumin-senpai.

Still drowsy, Kumin-senpai let out a “Kumi~n” as she stretched her body. On the topic of things Kumin-senpai says when stretching her body, Kumin-senpai can also let out a “Yaw~n” when she stretches. In fact, there was a multitude of things that she could say. Personally, I prefer her letting out a “Kumi~n” the most as it doubles as a self-introduction.

“I see, so Hideri-chan had been defeated. However, there’s no need to panic. Hideri-chan was the weakest among us –”

“Ge heh heh... It’s not that easy to defeat Master-death!”

Kumin-senpai, who was up by now, started to say a line like that out of nowhere. However, Dekomori interrupted Kumin-senpai by suddenly taking, for some reason, Rikka’s side.

“Nyahaha, well, I am the Demon Duchess☆.”

Shichimiya too was on board with what Kumin-senpai had abruptly said.

It was a strong self-assertion of her strength.

Hideri-senpai was – for some reason, Hideri-senpai had her eyes listlessly shut, looking very fatigued.

There are too many things for me to retort!

I guess for the time being, I’ll focus my efforts on retorting Dekomori.

The existence of underclassmen was quite the convenient thing.

“No, Dekomori-san, just whose side are you on? Isn’t returning Rikka back to her former self your top priority?”

“What is it now-death? Naturally, Dekomori’s top priority right now is to restore Master back to her former self, but Dekomori’s been on Master’s side from the very beginning-death. While the present Master is unladylike-death, Master is still not one who would lose easily-death!”

Nodding twice in agreement, Kumin-senpai then exaggerated what Dekomori had said – was what it may have appeared like, with how over the top Kumin-senpai was.

“That’s right. It’s next to impossible to win against Rikka-chan – I’ll need ter do me Mae West ter not die!²³”

²³ Here, Kumin speaks in the Kansai dialect. To properly convey this (and Yuuta’s thoughts a little later on), lines spoken in the Kansai dialect have been written in Cockney English.

“...Can you stop using the Kansai dialect just for the sake of playing the funny man?”

Well, we are in Osaka.

Still, I’ve never met anyone 'oo spoke in Kansai dialect before. But, then again, when talking about baseball, Kumin-senpai does sometimes say “nah way” for some reason...

Well, she is from the Kansai region after all. Maybe she just couldn’t help it.

“No no, it’s because I’m still half-asleep that it slipped out. Well, this time anyway. Therefore –”

“Eh? Was that pun²⁴ just now on purpose!?”

“Of course. We are in Osaka after all.”

What a strong love for her hometown!

Even if there’s no chance of her being invited to perform the ceremonial first pitch on Opening Day, she may still have her services requested by a tourism ambassador!

“Now, because it’s more or less expected of me by the situation to do so, I’m up~. I will assist Rikka-chan with the ability given to me by Yuu-chan, ‘Godlike Radiance’!”

As she said all that, Kumin-senpai stood up and let out a “hmph!” to raise her own spirits.

‘Godlike Radiance’ – the ability that I had actually given to Kumin-senpai.

I once again reminisced about what had happened.



“Please make it baseball related, Super Dark Flame Master-san. I’ll be in your care.”

To ensure that her power was baseball related, Kumin-senpai kept pleading for me to make it baseball related again and again.

Even if you ask for me to make it baseball related, as I wasn’t too familiar with baseball (although, perhaps I should study a bit about baseball, seeing that Rikka is interested in it too), I wasn’t sure if I could. Even if I did outright state that the ability is baseball related, I had no idea if it would be seen as such.

Be that as it may, with the way she’s being bringing it up until now, I’m not sure if she’ll accept anything but a baseball related ability.

²⁴ An untranslatable pun. Previously, Yuuta had asked Kumin to not use the Kansai dialect simply for the sake of playing the funny man (ボケ, boke). Kumin then responds by stating that it wasn’t her intention to let her dialect slip: rather, it was because she was still half-asleep (寝ボケる, nebokeru) that she spoke in Kansai dialect.

I'll have to rack my brains over this.

Baseball... baseball...

After much thinking, I finally remembered a certain pet phrase that Kumin-senpai loved saying. If I made that into an ability – seems like that'll be the way to go.

Creation of a baseball related ability complete.

These thoughts of mine – they were very chuunibyou-ish, if I do say so myself.

"Understood."

To meet Kumin-senpai's expectations – that was my response.

"To Kumin-senpai, I will grant this power – its name is 'Godlike Radiance'. Its power is _"

"Ah, 'godlike!'"

"...Death."

Thanks to Kumin-senpai mentioning that just now, I ended up replying in a very Dekomori-like way. That I needed to explain what that ability was after this blunder was quite embarrassing...

What should I do?

"I understand. I have the power of 'Godlike Radiance'. This ability, yes – it is the perfect ability for me!!! It suits me perfectly! And its name sounds great too!"

"....."

The exact same reaction as Hideri-senpai...

She came up with her own interpretation of her ability.

As expected of Hideri-senpai's only friend. They both think in the exact same way. Although, unlike Hideri-senpai, Kumin-senpai did seem to have a lot of other friends.

"...I'm sorry. It's only by a little, but I seem to have surpassed the Super Dark Flame Master... because I'm godlike. I'm God-Kumin now. I wonder if I'm the goddess of victory... Even now, my team is still undefeated when I watch their games in person at the stadium. Yep – I decide which team gets the walk-off home run."

With her chest puffed out, Kumin-senpai had a smug look on her face.

It was a very unworshipable face.

"You're copying Hideri-senpai on purpose now, aren't you!?"

I couldn't help but retort.

Surprisingly, Kumin-senpai got carried away by the mood too.

I had not forgotten about this cliché development.

This wasn't a drill that you had to do or something, I thought to myself.



And with that, my reminiscence came to an end.

Kumin-senpai had left the room during my reminiscence. She displayed a level of footwork that you not have guessed that she was capable of from the way she usually presents herself. Surprisingly, Kumin-senpai was the athletic type.

And so, we were back to looking at the monitor.

Kumin-senpai headed over to where Rikka had seated herself.

"Ah, Siesta-senpai."

"Non non: right now, I am God-Kumin. Rikka-chan."

Kumin-senpai – sorry, God-Kumin – made the same mysterious posed look that she had just made before.

Seeing such a God-Kumin, Rikka was flabbergasted.

"W-what's happened?" questioned Rikka. "Everyone... Aren't you all being a bit different from usual?"

"The one different from usual – is that not Rikka-chan?"

As Kumin-senpai said that, she sat down so that she was face-to-face with Rikka.

That's right, wasn't it? The one who was most different was Rikka.

The person who was most different didn't seem to notice just how different she herself was.

"I am the same as Hideri-chan. From that person – I received the power to help Rikka-chan."

"Huh... That person?"

Rikka tilted her head.

Apparently, she didn't seem to be aware that I was the person pulling the strings. Then again, it was true that just a few hours ago, I was the same as Rikka: a person who had lost their powers. Perhaps the possibility that I was pulling the strings never crossed her mind.

I wonder if Dekomori and Shichimiya were her prime suspects.

"Now, without delay, the mighty God-Kumin shall use the power of, um, what was it again, ah, 'Godlike Radiance' that she had received from Yuu– that person. I think."

"Oooh...! Siesta-senpai has an ability not involving sleep!"

What surprises Rikka was a mystery to me.

It was mysterious to the point where I retorted to myself "That's what surprises you!" in front of the others. However, neither Dekomori nor Shichimiya gave me a response.

Eh, what's this? This sense of isolation...

"Hah... Dark Flame Master thinks that everything needs a retort-death."

"That's right. That's not a good way to think at all, is it?"

Both of them had the same exasperated expression on their face!

And this feeling of déjà vu! I feel like someone's said the exact same thing to me before...

"What's with the two of you being so causal with each other all of a sudden!?"

"See, you did it again just now-death. And it's because the flow of things worsens when you retort-death."

"Right? Hero, you're banned from retorting for a bit. Demon Duchess Secret Technique – Chanting Lattice Seal of Silence."

"...Can't speak!"

My only weapon had suddenly been taken away from me! However, I didn't want to be looked like that at by those cold eyes again, so I was fine for things to keep moving along. I think, anyway.

Pay attention to the screen!

"Godlike Radiance activate – this here is the autographed uniform that the mighty God-Kumin had won in a giveaway. I truly am godlike. Rikka-chan, if your ability comes back, the mighty God-Kumin shall gift this to you."

"!!"

Rikka's eyes lit up with desire. It was super effective.

Or rather: God-Kumin has mistaken that autographed uniform as an ability.

However, since I no longer had the ability to – or to be more accurate, even though it felt like the opportunity to was being dangled right in front of me – I did not raise a retort. And so, continuing on.

"W-woah! Wow! But it's no good... My ability isn't...!"

“That’s okay. I will just give it to you as a gift when your ability comes back. Why, you ask? Because I am a god.”

“Eh! Thank you so very much! Siesta-senpai! Ah, I mean, God-Kumin! Wow!”

“In exchange, let’s go to a live baseball game together again. Well then, that’s it from me.”

As she said that, the beaming God-Kumin waved goodbye as she disappeared from the clubroom.

The only thing left on screen was the Rikka, who looked delighted.

...You, just what did you even go there to do – was something I could not say. It’s painful not being able to say the things that you want to say.

Nonetheless, the attempt just now to restore Rikka’s abilities felt the closest so far to succeeding.

As expected of God-Kumin – I wonder if I would be allowed to say that?

This insane pent-up feeling... Such is the world where I can’t say the things I wanted to say...!

“I’m back~. No, even God-Kumin wasn’t able to bring Rikka-chan back; sorry about that. Ah, now I’m Tired-Kumin. Sleeping-Kumin.”

“.....”

Kumin-senpai should not have been such a character!

Attaching Kumin to the end of everything!

Was God-Kumin such a character? Although I was the one who conferred to her her ability, the answer to that question was just beyond the scope of my knowledge...

“Ge heh heh, it’s just like Dekomori said-death. It’s not so easy to win against Master-death.”

“Just three people left...”

As if she was complaining, Shichimiya took a short pause before continuing with her words.

“Guess it can’t be helped. Up next is the final battle – a three-man assault☆.”



Staff Officer Shichimiya once again made it clear that she originally wanted for everyone to challenge Rikka together.

It was a “that way, Rikka-chan’s competitive spirit would flare up too, and thus her abilities would make a return” sort of plan.

However, even that staff officer was still only just one person – and because she didn't believe that she could read the actions of the unprecedentedly unprecedented uniquely distinctive superhuman existence known as Hideri-senpai, she gave up on that plan.

Considering what had happened, that hunch of hers had been right on the mark. That her hunch had been right seemingly relieved our staff officer.

Back when it was Kumin-senpai turn to go, it seemed that Shichimiya also contemplated proposing an all-member offensive. However, because she thought that it was vital for us to observe Rikka for at least a little bit, she had decided against it. Now that we had observed Rikka, it appeared that Shichimiya thought that the time for an all-member offensive was now.

When it was first proposed for us to make a three-man assault, I thought that Dekomori would object with “Dekomori will assist Master by herself-death!” or something, but Dekomori surprisingly accepted said proposal without any resistance.

When I asked Dekomori why she accepted said proposal, it seemed that it was because she had a similar opinion to Shichimiya on the matter.

“Dekomori's already said it many times before-death: it would be impossible for just Dekomori alone to win against Master-death. Even if she could not use her powers, Master is still an existence that could instantly defeat Dekomori-death. As such, although Dekomori is reluctant, Dekomori will borrow the power the person who even Master has recognised as her rival, Sofia-senpai-death – eh, there's no particular need for Dark Flame Master's power, is there-death?”

Was what she said.

For the time being, it seems that Dekomori recognises Shichimiya's strength in her own Dekomori-like way.

I do wish that she would stop looking down on me sometime soon though.

And then.

When Dekomori was out of earshot, Shichimiya whispered to me that the Super Dark Flame Master was basically the key to reviving Rikka's powers.

“It's because you are her contractee. She'll resonate with you. When Hero gets a boost to his power, Rikka-chan's seal will be lifted too, won't it? And so, I'm counting on you☆.”

Or so she says.

Well, it did come from the staff officer. There's no way it could be wrong.

And so, the three of us stepped onto the field of the decisive battle.

To the place where Rikka was.

The three of us entered the clubroom together – was what I thought we were doing, but Dekomori had split off from the rest of us to charge headfirst into battle. It seemed that Dekomori lost all self-control when she saw Rikka.

“Masteeer!!! Return to your former self-deaaaaaath!!!”

Certain Kill – Manipulative Tears!

In a one-person suicide attack, Dekomori clung onto Rikka in tears. She grinded her face against Rikka’s waist.

“Ah, er... D-don’t cry, Sanae-chan...”

Seeing Dekomori in a state like that, Rikka looked troubled as she gently stroked Dekomori’s head.

However, “Sanae-chan”.

Usually, Rikka addresses Dekomori by something like “my servant” or “Dekomori”. Did the way Rikka addressed Dekomori change because of the loss of the Devilish Truth Stare? If that was the case, I could sort of understand why Dekomori felt like crying.

Sure enough, calling Dekomori Sanae-chan made things worse. Dekomori started to wail even louder.

Just like Dekomori predicted earlier, she had “instantly defeated Dekomori-death”.

“Waaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaah!!! Don’t call me Sanae-chan-deaaaaaaaaaaaaath!!! Call me Servant-deaaaaaath!!! Call me Servant-deaaaaaath!!!”

“Se-servant...”

“Waaaaaaaaah!!! Wrong-death, it’s servant-deaaaaaath!!!”

Dekomori continued to cry.

She was crying so much to the point where, like seen in manga, her tears were coming out like a waterfall.

“Waaaaaaaaaaaaah!!! Masteeer!!! Masteeer!!!”

Afterwards, Dekomori continued to cry out loud for another 5 minutes before she managed to reduce it to a sniffle. Her eyes looked tired from crying. There were still tears coming out of her eyes though.

What was she, a child?

I mean, well, the Rikka that she respected and admired did address her rather distantly with that “Sanae-chan”: it made sense that she couldn’t stop crying.

In order to comfort Dekomori – who on laying on the ground in a tearful state – Rikka caressed Dekomori’s head while saying “there, there”.

Listen up!

She's super kind, my girlfriend!

However, it felt like the timing for Shichimiya and I to come out had been completely lost.

Properly speaking, our strategy had failed. However, it seemed that Rikka had yet to notice that Shichimiya and I were here.

In that case, there was still the option of withdrawing and replanning the strategy –

"No, we are not withdrawing. Within this predicament lies our opportunity. While I will take responsibility for failing to predict that Deko-chan would run off by herself and act rashly, the groundwork that had been laid is still fine. If you think about it, it's been an all member offensive since Hideri-san. And now, I'll try set the perfect stage for your entrance, Hero☆."

Shichimiya spoke as if she had foreseen what I had wanted to say.

"M-my entrance?"

"Nyahaha, just wait there a bit, Hero! Just enter when the timing feels right!"

It was now Shichimiya's turn to ride forth by herself into the battlefield known as the clubroom.

As instructed, I hid outside the classroom and watched over the situation attentively.

"Nyahahaha. It seems that Deko-chan too has been defeated."

After entering inconspicuously, Shichimiya leaned against the wall of the clubroom and said her line.

Shichimiya had a very strong entertainer mindset – like a director. I probably should have noticed earlier, but perhaps both Hideri-senpai's and Kumin-senpai's entrances from earlier (in the case of the latter, I decided without any real basis that it definitely was) were also the brainchild of Shichimiya.

"S-sofia?"

"Nyahaha! Yes! That is correct! My dark scarf is charged with magic power, glistening with the destructive energy of the Demon Duchess! As planned, Magical Demon Duchess Sofia is here!"

It was the usual exchange that she had with Rikka, with the usual imposing stance (standing completely upright, with her hands on her hips) that she assumed – it seemed that she didn't feel satisfied unless she did these two things.

She truly was like a director.

More importantly, Shichimiya was still Sofia to Rikka. On that note, the way Rikka addressed Hideri-senpai and Kumin-senpai didn't change either. That made me a little curious as to where Rikka drew the line regarding nicknames. Did her servant contract with Dekomori expire or something?

"Of all people, for the user of the Devilish Truth Stare to lose their powers – was what I had thought, but it played out as I had expected. Hideri-san, Kumin-san, and Deko-chan had all been defeated. In spite of such strength – I didn't ask this morning, Rikka-chan, but why do you think that the Devilish Truth Stare has lost its power?"

"I-I'm not sure... If I did, I'd..."

"...I see. So that's how it is. As expected, it looks like Rikka-chan *is losing her powers.*"

"Eh...?"

"Nyahaha. Do you find it troubling when your rival makes light of you?"

Shichimiya, whilst still maintaining a straight posture, shrugged as she said that.

"That is why I will not take you lightly. Even if there is 'something' that has caused your ability to disappear – Rikka-chan and I, we are equally matched in strength."

"That's... The me right now is... Sofia's–"

"No, Rikka-chan's actually above me in strength. It's vexing to admit it, but it's true."

Shichimiya cut Rikka off, strongly refuting her words.

In response, Rikka became silent. It seemed that she felt as if she had no choice but to stay silent after hearing that admission.

As for me, I thought that it was obvious that Shichimiya was stronger given Rikka's present state (regardless of whether it was mental or physical, the current Rikka was quite poor at everything). However, it seemed that the person herself had a completely different view of things.

I wonder what Shichimiya's judgement of strength was based on.

"That is why I will not fight alone. Everyone facing you and falling to you earlier – its purpose was so I could use everyone's power! I offer the souls of three people as sacrifices! A tribute summoning!"

Shichimiya then shifted from her usual imposing stance to form the "Shichimiya-style secret technique – The Sacred Imperial Zenith Seven" (with both hands curled a fist, extend both arms out to the front before slowly moving the right arm so that it forms a seven!) pose.

After making the pose, Shichimiya began chanting.

"The hero who is clad in jet black power – now is the time for you to appear before me once again!"

It was a signal from Shichimiya.

An easy-to-understand signal telling me to make my entrance as flashy as possible. In other words, to make a very Shichimiya-like entrance.

And so, I.

“Mwahaha! I am the one who governs the darkness of this world – the being who is also known as the Super Dark Flame Master!”

And.

Gently opening the door, I entered the clubroom quietly.

Sigh.

Entrances don’t seem to be my strong point.

If it were Hideri-senpai, she definitely would have made some flashy entrance like smashing the door open to enter or appearing without warning from the ceiling. It would be nice if I were the sort of person capable of doing such a thing, but unfortunately those sorts of things were impossible for someone like me.

The only thing I could make flashy about that shabby entrance of mine was the dialogue.

In response to my entrance, Rikka,

“S-super Dark Flame Master!? Yuuta, what happened to you!? Amazing! Cool! There’s nothing not cool about you!”

praised me to the point where it felt insincere.

My entrance... went over well!? In that case, it’s time to go on the offensive!

As that thought crossed my mind,

“Hey hey, just wait a minute, Hero! You’ve got to make your entrance even more grand. After all, it is your long-awaited resurrection.”

As expected, Shichimiya called for a retake.

“Good grief” was the sort of impression I got as Shichimiya shrugged her shoulders again.

“E-eh...? But I’m not sure how to make it feel grander... I’m drawing a bit of a blank here...”

“Jeez, just look☆.”

As she said that, Shichimiya pointed at Rikka firmly.

“Rikka-chan has lost her powers –”

“Eh, eh, me...!?”

Rikka was shocked that she was made the topic of conversation out of the blue.

It seemed that she could not keep up with how fast this mysterious situation was developing.

“I – no, we will restore Rikka-chan’s powers! The newly reborn Demon Duchess and Hero! Hey, Hero, this way!”

Prompted by Shichimiya, I positioned myself so that I was back-to-back with Shichimiya.

Then, when I received an instruction from Shichimiya to turn my face in Rikka’s direction –

“As for my name – Great Sofia! And now you, Hero!”

“Hmph, Super Dark Flame Master. Mwahahahaha!”

– the two of us tried to look cool as we delivered our lines.

There was a large explosion behind us. I do not mean this metaphorically: there actually was an explosion. Being surprised, I turned my head to look back – was what I initially wanted to do, but since I quickly figured out what the true form of that explosion was, I decided against it. As for how I figured the true form of the explosion out: it was because a large amount of confetti fell right before my eyes.

It seemed that a large party cracker was set off behind us.

How grand – Shichimiya... you planned for this to happen, didn’t you?

I’m guessing that it was Dekomori’s bodyguards that prepared the party cracker for her.

“Woah...! Amazing!”

Unlike me, who was surprised by the explosion, Rikka seemed to be enthralled by it.

Huh? Does this mean that things are going smoothly?

“W-well? Do you feel your powers returning via resonance?”

I tried checking if it worked or not with Rikka.

After opening her hands and comparing her palms (I had no idea what the meaning behind that action was), Rikka,

“Hmm? It hasn’t returned, I think?”

answered like so while tilting her head many times over.

“So cute!” was not what had crossed my mind.

So, it didn't work...

No, it's not over yet! I can raise my chuunibyou power even higher! And when I raise my chuunibyou power higher, there's a chance that Rikka will resonate with me, restoring her powers!

"Mwahahaha. That too was part of my calculations. Super Dark Flame Master is super after all! I still have much more to show you!

"Dark Flame Sword! Charge up!

"Haaah! Return, abilitiessss!!!

"Tch... no good..."

"Don't say such feeble things, Hero! A hero must never lose heart!

"I'll show my powers off too☆. Take a good look! This is the power of a Demon Duchess!

"Great Sofia Perfect Mode! Rikka-chan's powers – returrrrrn!

"I... couldn't restore them either!?"

The two of us kept on doing things that Rikka liked.

In response to each of our actions, Rikka let out a confused "Eh? Eh? Ah, ah..." and shook her head to let us know that her powers did not return.

After, Shichimiya and I tried a whole bunch of other things. In the end, however, nothing we tried worked.

In conclusion, our strategy had failed.

"U-um... I'm sorry... Even though you did all this for me, I..."

Rikka apologised like never before.

The way she kept lowering her head was quite cute, however.

"No no, it's not your fault at all, Rikka."

"Nyaha. That's right, Rikka-chan's not at fault at all. It's just that the Devilish Truth Stare *is in a poor condition, right?*"

"Eh, ah, right..."

Rikka hanged her head dejectedly.

I wished that Rikka would cheer up somehow. However, given how nothing Shichimiya and I tried had worked, I don't blame her for finding it hard to be in high spirits. What could I do to cheer her up?

Seeing my troubled face, Shichimiya made her usual fearless smile.

“Nyahaha, well, with what just happened, it is only inevitable to feel worried. This strategy had failed. But that’s fine, isn’t it? There are still many things that haven’t trialled yet. For example, waiting until tomorrow – it’s quite possible that today is just a day where the Devilish Truth Stare doesn’t appear, right?”

“Ah, that is indeed possible.”

I nodded in agreement.

It was a possibility that I had completely overlooked. This was indeed only the first day of the Devilish Truth Stare’s disappearance. And although I had panicked and raised a commotion about it, it was indeed possible that the Devilish Truth Stare would simply make its reappearance tomorrow.

Even if we didn’t know what caused Rikka’s powers to disappear, observing how things developed with Rikka in the coming days was indeed a tool we could use to assist Rikka in restoring her powers.

“Y-yeah... Maybe... My powers could come back tomorrow... Or maybe not... I’m still not quite sure myself... Sorry...”

Rikka was apologetic.

Urgh. Seeing how pained Rikka felt made me feel remorseful as well.

That being said, as we couldn’t come up with any better strategies, and since Dekomori and our two upperclassmen were down for the count (with one of the upperclassmen confirmed to be asleep), there was nothing left for us to do but to clean the clubroom up.

“So that’s how things are. I don’t think it’s a bad plan, for us to be entrusting our hopes on tomorrow.”

After saying such a chuuni-ish line, “Given that there’s nothing else that we could do for now, let’s break up for today” was what I was going to suggest – but.

“Right? Tomorrow’s special thing will happen tomorrow, won’t it?”

That was what that person said. That upperclassman.

She was sitting gracefully on the principal’s desk, with her legs crossed.

“People have days where they’re not normal – having said that, as DevTru Rikka-chan is, by nature, an extraordinary human being, she would be having days where she’s normal, right? Oh, but we don’t have those sorts of days. We’re always a deviant.”

“Don’t say that about yourself!”

Wait no, the truth is that you really are a deviant!

More importantly, when did you arrive here? It’s not normal!

Since she has such an overwhelming presence, I should have noticed her the instant she entered the clubroom. And yet, I honestly had no idea how long she had been here. I hadn't noticed her at all. I checked with Shichimiya via eye contact if she had noticed Hideri-senpai: "I didn't notice her either" was the reply I got from her eyes. Rikka didn't seem to have noticed Hideri-senpai as well, as she was shaking her head when I turned to look at her.

"Um..."

"We understand. How long have we been here, you ask? Since the very start! From when the giant cracker went off!"

"....."

The fact that I didn't find it strange for her to have been there was troubling.

Wait no, finding it not strange for her to be there was an absolutely dangerous thing to think. She should not have been there at all... I'm not going to go any deeper with this. It'd scare me if she actually was there.

"Now now. As the president of this club, we'll be marking now as the end of today's club activities, okay? It is getting quite late. We did specially extend today's club activities by quite a while after all."

In response to Hideri-senpai's words, I checked the clock – our school had closed for the day more than an hour ago.

If anyone asked why I had stayed behind at school so late, I could probably give off a good impression by spinning it as being passionate for club activities. It is a pity, however, that I wouldn't be able to tell them what our club activities entailed. The things we did for club activities weren't exactly things that I could comfortably share with others.

Well, but our club activities were fun.

"Besides."

Hideri-senpai, as if to give herself an air of importance, took a short pause before continuing with a grin.

"It wouldn't be good if DevTru Rikka-chan returned to her former self during this comic relief moment, would it?"

Have some tact!



Although it was our clubroom, as it would not have been great to leave the principal's office in a mess, the four of us tidied the clubroom in a way that left Rikka ignorant of the surveillance cameras (as Dekomori had fallen into a deep sleep, her bodyguards took her home first. The plan was for them to collect the equipment left behind on a later date. And

it went without saying that God-Kumin was still asleep). We then made our respective ways home.

On the way back home.

“Yuuta – no, Super Dark Flame Master – sorry about today. However, the fact that you were so concerned about me makes me happy. Thank you.”

Rikka, who was walking right next to me, suddenly straightened her posture and told me that.

Although she was smiling, there was a sense of gloominess coming from her. It was like she was saying “I’m so terribly sorry” many times over.

I do not want Rikka to feel gloomy like that.

I have to cheer her up somehow.

“No, there’s no need for you to apologise as you’re not at fault, Rikka. In fact, you should set your mind at ease. I, the Super Dark Flame Master, am here, and so everything will work out fine. I will without a doubt return you to your former self.”

“Ahaha. Yuuta, you’re so cool!”

There was no trace of gloominess in Rikka’s present smile.

She seemed to have regained a bit of her energy.

By the way, I was still in Super Dark Flame Master mode. Although it would not have been troublesome for me to change out of it, I had hoped that wearing this outfit would coax Rikka into speaking freely about her thoughts.

It was very embarrassing to wear, however.

Everyone who passed us by stared at me.

They all looked at me as if they had seen something strange. I couldn’t help but be conscious of my appearance.

“Still, what happened? Didn’t you tell me yesterday that the Dark Flame Master was sealed?”

“Right. That’s why I – why I am a hero. Helping Rikka. For that purpose, I have broken the seal that I had placed on myself.”

“Ehh, is that so? Yep, Yuuta is my hero. Thank you.”

Rikka replied to my embarrassing chuuni-ish line with a smile.

Just hearing those words from her made breaking the seal worth it. At first, I was a little worried I had been hoodwinked by Shichimiya, but now I’m grateful to her.

Nothing Shichimiya says is ever wrong!

"Ooh. Just leave it to me – that being said, I haven't managed to help you yet. But I will for sure. Because I'm a hero."

"...Yes. That's right, isn't it?"

Rikka answered somewhat evasively.

It made me a little worried.

Or more accurately, it made me wonder what Rikka thought of the current situation.

As it happened without warning, since this morning I had been in a state of panic. I hadn't been able to think things through properly either.

Rikka was the one who had lost the Devilish Truth Stare. And although I could sense that she felt troubled by it, I had yet to ask her what she wanted.

I had decided on my own that Rikka wanted the Devilish Truth Stare to come back.

Well, since I was the type of person who tended to worry a lot, it wasn't wrong of me to have done all sorts of things for Rikka's sake. However.

It was possible that my conjecture was incorrect.

It was possible that Rikka had a different take on the current situation.

And so, I asked.

"Rikka, about the Devilish Truth Stare – do you want it to return?"

"Umm, I'm not actually too sure myself."

Rikka answered without hesitation. It was as if she had prepared the answer beforehand.

And, it was an answer that I did not expect.

"Ah, umm, you see, I do want for it to come back. It is my ability after all. However, I've been thinking about this a lot, and, well, if it doesn't come back, there's not much I can do about it, is there... or something. To be honest, I don't know. Because *this is the first time something like this has happened to me.*"

"...That's true."

"But! The silver lining in me losing my ability was that it made way for Yuuta's resurrection. Although, it wasn't like anything unfortunate had happened to me."

"....."

No, I'd say that losing the Devilish Truth Stare was something that was quite unfortunate.

Also, my resurrection was mostly a terrible roleplay of the mental image I had of myself in the past.

“Moreover, when you appeared before me as the Super Dark Flame Master, I could feel my heart racing. It was only by a small amount, but I felt like my powers were returning.”

“Eh, seriously!?”

“Yep. Really. That is why I don’t think that the Devilish Truth Stare has completely disappeared. Yes, the Devilish Truth Stare has, without a doubt, not disappeared.”

“I see.”

I replied to Rikka’s sincere words with a small nod.

I too believed that the Devilish Truth Stare had not disappeared. As for why – it was probably because it was the same as me.

I wasn’t sure what exactly Rikka meant when she said that it had not disappeared, but – mine too, it had not disappeared.

Although I keep saying that I’ve moved on from it – my chuunibyou has yet to vanish.

There were times where I wanted it to vanish, yes.

But not anymore.

I was able to accept everything about it now. That’s why, in a sense, my Dark Flame Master persona will never disappear.

...In fact, it’s become even more audacious than before.

Like most people, the past me would have never gone home in such a gaudy costume. He would have been afraid of being misunderstood by society. I’ve continued to “evolve” since then...!

Huh... Now that I think about it, something similar happened to the me back then, didn’t it...?

“It happened to me as well. A time where my powers refused to emerge.”

A little story from my past.

Back when I first met Rikka, I stubbornly refused to disclose anything about my past to her. Now, however, I was fine with telling her all about my past. As long as it would be of use to her, I was fine with her knowing everything.

“It happened to you as well?”

“Yeah. That’s why I wonder if it could happen to anyone. In my case, when the person I idolised suddenly disappeared, I stopped being able to use my powers well. Perhaps my inability to use my powers well was due to me being worried about a variety of different things. And perhaps I had then abandoned my powers due to my powers growing dull. Or something. Either way, it could have been due to a lot of things, right?”

“.....”

“Perhaps things would have been different, however, if they had said something to me before disappearing – something like ‘I shalt aim for a coequal higher ideal. Anon!’”

“You had idolised someone with such an old-fashioned way of talking...”

“Eh? Ah, no, even though I wish they did, they didn’t talk like that at all. The me back then always thought that to become the strongest, one would need to be under the tutelage of a senior monk-sort of person!”

Ideally, they would be someone whose body would be restored to its prime when their power is raised.

On top of that, if they hid their face with a mask or something... That would be the sort of person I’d admire the most!

“Either way, back when I was troubled about what was the best thing for me to do when my powers weren’t coming out – my conclusion was that I should train. I believed that things would work out if I became a more amazing person or something.”

Although the end result was that it became my dark history.

I screwed up quite badly, didn’t I?

Simply remembering what I did was enough to make me writhe in pain.

See, right when I started my second year of middle school, I did things like using a shovel to dig a hole at the edge of the school’s sport ground. I did gain physical strength. It was just that physical strength was the only thing I gained.

There was a lot more that happened back then, but I’ll omit the rest for now.

Because of all the things I did, I never wanted to walk through the front gates of my middle school ever again.

I would be way too embarrassed.

Well, but it was because of all the things that I did in the past that I’m the person I am today. Still, my embarrassment about it hasn’t changed.

“I see. Training.”

“Mm. Well, that was my story. That is why I think that something similar to what I experienced is happening to you as well, and why I believe that something might change for you tomorrow.”

“Yeah. Thank you for sharing that with me. I too believe that something might change for me tomorrow. There’s a lot for me to think about, isn’t there?”

Rikka had a bright smile on her face. It seemed that my story had been of some small use.

If it was necessary, I would not have minded telling her more stories from my past. Unfortunately, however, we were almost out of time.

We had already arrived at the front of Rikka's apartment.

In other words, it was time for us to say our goodbyes to one another.

"No, I will never break up with Rikka, ever!" was the sort of thing I thought every time we needed to part. Because of that, I hope that time where we needed to say a farewell to each other like that never comes.

"U-um, Yuuta. Do you remember what you said to me during our break time...?"

Suddenly.

Rikka, who, with her bright red cheeks, looked quite embarrassed, asked that of me.

Cute.

"Er... That you perhaps didn't have enough magic – was that it?"

"Yeah yeah! That's it!"

Rikka shook her head cutely many times.

Because her face was quite red, seeing her shake her head like that reminded me of an akabeko²⁵.

"I'm sorry for back then. Getting told something like that so suddenly threw me into a state of panic..."

"No no, back then I just said whatever crossed my mind. I definitely should have considered the time and place before I said what I said..."

"Y-yeah. And, well, ever since you brought that up, it's been on my mind, and after a lot of thinking, well, I believe that we should give it – that is, replenishing my magic as it may need replenishing after all – a try... or something."

"Oh. In that case, I'll replenish your magic with all my strength. But..."

"R-right! Then, right now – ah, the Demon King isn't here today."

The explanation to that enigmatic statement.

The Demon King isn't here? In other words, that it was safe.

I thought that Rikka would have lost that sort of detection ability with the disappearance of her Devilish Truth Stare. Regardless, I'll put my faith in what Rikka says.

²⁵ A traditional Japanese toy that resembles a red cow. Based off a legend from the Aizu region of Japan, the toy is typically made out of two pieces of papier-mâché-covered wood. When the toy moves, the head bobs around.

That being said, as it would still likely be a problem if we hugged on the street (I was currently still in my Super Dark Flame Master state. If I hugged her right here and now, it would, from a bystander's point of view, look like that a pervert was trying to assault a cute high school girl), like before I guided Rikka to the door of her apartment.

"Ah, um... It might be better to do it inside the apartment than out here."

"Eh, ah, is that so...?"

This time, Rikka guided me by pulling on the sleeves of my clothes. She brought me to the entranceway of her apartment.

To be honest, it has been a long time since I had last visited Rikka's apartment.

Nowadays, if we were to hang out, Rikka almost always comes over to my house. And, because Rikka's older sister had cautioned her by saying, "When a guy readily heads over to the place of a girl that lives alone – what does that say about him?", I did refrain a little from visiting.

Although Rikka herself stated "I don't care" – if I were to grow older and become a father, I think I would likely say something similar to my hypothetical daughter, and so I heeded Rikka's sister's concerns seriously.

I am a gentleman, after all.

It appeared that the number of possessions Rikka had increased during my long absence from her apartment (I had a limited view of the inside of her apartment due to the narrow entranceway). However, her apartment still felt neat and tidy. Previously, her apartment used to feel a bit barren; it now has a more lived-in feel.

"Well then, um..."

I would have liked it if we could stand at the entranceway and continue talking with each other. However, given how late we were in returning back to Rikka's apartment, it was probably for the best that I headed home as soon as possible.

Even though the person cautious of me wasn't present.

I fixed my gaze on Rikka as I spoke.

"My magic power – take all of it."

As I said that, I embraced Rikka firmly.

When I embraced her, I heard Rikka let out a cute squeal. This too was me putting what I've learnt in the past to good use.

It wasn't a "squeeze" but a "squeeeze"! A strong, strong hug.

"H-how is it? Your magic power, does it feel replenished?"

In response to my awkwardly phrased question (I still wasn't used to saying something like that yet), Rikka –

“Ehehe, yep, I can feel my magic power being replenished. I feel so happy.”

– gently placed her hand on my back as she responded as such.

“I-I see. That's good.”

“Er, but, well – um, just a little more... I think?”

“A little more?”

“Y-yeah! Or rather, that it's still not enough. W-well, look, the Devilish Truth Stare is an amazing power, and so...”

“I see. So you're saying that the recently revived Super Dark Flame Master's power is not up to the task of replenishing the necessary magic power to power the Devilish Truth Stare. It seems that more training is needed again.”

“Ahaha, maybe. Yep, thank you.”

As she said that, as if prompting me to release her from the magic replenishment, Rikka pulled her hand away from my back.

Following her lead, I freed Rikka from my embrace.

“It seems like it didn't return today. Sorry.”

“No, no, I too am sorry for my lack of power.”

“Nuh-uh. That's not true. The stand in for my magic meter, my happiness gauge, is full. And so, I was wondering if we could do this again tomorrow?”

What Rikka had just said was so cute.

To such a cute Rikka, I wanted to meet to her expectations no matter what.

“Oh! Of course! In fact, I'll be happy to do anything you want!”

“A-anything!?”

Rikka latched on way too hard on the word “anything”.

It wasn't how wide her eyes were open (which was obviously different from usual as she lacked her eyepatch) that got me so astonished, no.

Rather, I was astonished that Rikka had such a reaction in the first place. I had always prided myself as someone who was willing to do anything for Rikka.

“O-okay! Then as thanks, I'll also do anything that you want! Even asking for something now from me would be fine!”

"N-now? Hmm, nothing comes to mind right now... Coming up with something will be my homework. I'll keep pondering about it."

"I-is that so... okay! Then I'll be waiting to hear back from you!"

"Well, in that case, because it's getting late now, I need to head back home soon. Er, um, so about the exchange diary –"

"Ah... would you mind if I handed the exchange diary a little later this time? I want to write a lot about the things that happened today, so..."

"Is that so? Sure, no problem."

I accepted Rikka's proposal without resistance.

Although I've never been told to wait for the exchange diary (Sunday's portion was probably already written) until now, I wanted to respect Rikka's desire to write a lot about today.

Also, this way, I might be able to gain a greater understanding of the things that were happening to Rikka.

"I think I'll be able to hand you the exchange diary tomorrow."

"Roger. I'll see you tomorrow then."

"Yep, see you tomorrow."

Rikka's smile never left her face as she saw me off. She waved at me until I was out of sight.

For my trip back home, I was alone.

Although I was stared at when I was walking with Rikka, when I was walking by myself the people who passed by me pretended as if they didn't see me – and so, like that, while obtaining intel that didn't matter, I walked home feeling miserable.

Exchange Diary: To Yuuta

Monday, 6th June (today is the devil's day).

Did you know? The 6th of June is known as the devil's day.

I probably didn't need to ask. I'm sure you knew that already, Yuuta. I was just thinking, could it be possible for the disappearance of the Devilish Truth Stare to be related to the devil's day?

Isn't the Devilish Truth Stare disappearing on the devil's day too much of a coincidence!?

Like the devil's day, perhaps the 6th of June is a day where the Devilish Truth Stare vanishes?

Nah, something like that probably wasn't the case.

On a completely unrelated topic, Sofia has told me that she was born on the 6th of July at 6:06. Although Sofia herself says, "I'm the demon of July. That is why I am Sofia Ring SP Saturn the 7th. I am burdened by a fateful birthday☆.", I'm little envious of her birthday.

It was soo cool!

While it is my birthday soon too, I just wish that, like Sofia's, there could be some significance behind its date or something. Yuuta's birthday, the 7th of July, is on a date with a lot of meaning behind it too, which makes me jealous!

Ehehe, I accidentally went off on a tangent there.

Sorry.

And I'm really sorry for worrying everyone today.

I didn't think that I would worry everyone so much.

And, I think I did something especially bad to Dekomori.

When I called her Sanae-chan, I intended for it to be just a small joke: I didn't think that she would burst into tears like that...

I'm so terribly sorry for today...

However, today also made very happy.

I never knew that everyone could be so worried about me.

To tell the truth, before you, Dekomori, and Sofia arrived, Arc-san and Siesta-senpai came to the clubroom. They were both worried about me. At first, I was a little surprised as nobody else was in the clubroom.

Did you know?

The two of them have finally awakened to their abilities.

Arc-san's ability, "^{Seventh Seven}7th VII", was an ability that perfectly encapsulates Arc-san herself. It was an amazing special ability.

You need to be careful as well, Yuuta. Arc-san's ability is a truly scary ability.

I might have still lost to her even with the Devilish Truth Stare...

Also, there seemed to be something like a shadow attached to her words when she spoke with me today. Was that too an ability?

As for Siesta-senpai, I honestly think that her "ability to sleep" was way more amazing than the ability she had awakened.

I envy the fact that she could sleep anywhere, anytime.

However, thanks to it brining me great fortune, Siesta-senpai's God-Kumin mode does seem worthy of being called godlike. This time, I received some rare goods from her. I'm overjoyed!

Still, Siesta-senpai mentioned that she had received her ability from "that person". I wonder who that was?

Did you know who it was, Yuuta?

Was "that person" Sofia after all?

Ah, there was that too. Something amazing happened today. Can you promise that you won't be mad?

Well! Arc-san, she kissed me!

She really isn't normal!

This probably was not a thing that I should be telling you, but I'll give you a full report of it anyway. Surprisingly, her lips were softer than yours! Although, I may have thought that it was softer simply because of how unexpected the kiss was...

I had said something like "Was this meant to be shock therapy, Arc-san?" to her after the kiss.

Like how startling someone cures them of their hiccups, was kissing me meant to shock me into having my powers back?

Well, but in the end, my powers didn't come back...

And you too, Yuuta – thank you for being so worried about me.

I found the Super Dark Flame Master super super cool!

I mentioned this today already, but perhaps the reason why the Devilish Truth Stare lost its power was so it could make way for something like Yuuta's resurrection as the Super Dark Flame Master.

I had told you this on our way home as well, but I spent all day today thinking about what I should do if the Devilish Truth Stare did not return.

Since the Devilish Truth Stare was something that I had originally inherited – did that mean when the time came, its power would run out and be no more?

Could that time have been today? Was this the reason why the Devilish Truth Stare disappeared?

I'm not sure of the answer yet.

However, I do believe that it will be properly back someday... That's why, like how everyone did for me today – I too will think about this a lot.

It is about me after all.

I'm sorry for worrying you.

However, I am fine.

I'm full of energy!

Especially since Yuuta has replenished my magic.

Anyway, for the time being, I'll wait and see what happens tomorrow.

“Postscript”

This was written after I had woken up the next morning.

The Devilish Truth Stare hasn't returned yet.

However, there's no need to worry.

I'm full of energy!

I'm fine!

Chapter 7: Summer Triangle Encirclement!

Morning. Before the first period.

I had finished reading the exchange diary that I received from Rikka on our way to school.

Because she had told me about it on our way to school, I was already aware that Rikka's Devilish Truth Stare had yet to return. And although she had told me not to worry about it as she was feeling full of energy multiple times, I became even more worried.

It was probably because Rikka knew that I was worried that she told me that that she was fine many times over. And I know that it's not good for me to be worrying so much.

Hmm... But even so, I still strongly felt as if I had to do something.

When I read her diary entry, I got the strong impression that Rikka was feeling quite bewildered as this was the first time something like this had happened to her. The fact that she was so baffled by the Devilish Truth Stare's disappearance made the entire situation three times as confusing for me. Even so, as her boyfriend – no, as her contractee, there must be something I could do to help.

I came to a similar conclusion yesterday as well.

If it's for Rikka, I'll do anything.

Well, then again, that was the stance that I originally always had.

That being said – I had not been able to come up with any ideas on what to do. While I did state that it would be my homework to come up with something yesterday, and although I did keep thinking about it until I fell asleep, I was not able to come up with anything that could be called a good idea.

As a last resort – I continued on with the strategy from yesterday.

Betting on the possibility that Rikka will be become inspired and have her powers come back, the stupid idea (it seemed like a good idea at the time) to once again don the role of the Super Dark Flame Master was born.

And so, the plan was set in motion.

Although it made me uncomfortably warm while I walked to school, I utilised the new power I had received from Shichimiya yesterday – I wore a mantle over my uniform and spiked my hair.

I call it 'Super Dark Flame Master Simple Mode'.

Since remodelling my uniform or wearing the costume that I had received in lieu of my uniform would likely tarnish the reputation of my friend in the disciplinary council, I decided against doing either of those things.

My outfit was at the very limits of what would be considered as appropriate schoolwear.

Then again, as I have a friend who challenges school regulations and continues to wear her scarf despite it being summer, and as do know an upperclassman who constantly draws the ire of the head of the disciplinary council with her rainbow-coloured hair, I probably could get away with saying that what I have done to my schoolwear was no big deal.

Now that I think about it, it's like the members of my club were trying to challenge the authority of the disciplinary committee.

Rikka and Dekomori's uniforms both fell into the dubious category too.

However, as our principal had stated "Since freedom is a key part of the school ethos, it's fine☆. In fact, go for it. Be bursting with individuality!" before, alterations to the school dress code did not seem to be a major issue. Our school was like the inverse version of a school where the student council held tremendous authority: individual students held all the power instead.

It would not be an exaggeration to say that bodies like the student council held no real power.

I mean, look – the given name of the president of the student council was Tsukinami²⁶. "Medicore-san". Then again, unlike what her name would suggest, she was quite the beauty.

An upperclassman who was the polar opposite of Hideri-senpai. The rumours have it, however, that the two of them seem to have some sort of fated connection to one another.

Still, I'm glad that this was such a weird school. We wouldn't be able to express ourselves like this at any other school.

But I digress.

Anyway, that "I'll do anything" – as proof of this determination of mine, I had donned the role of the Super Dark Flame Master when I met up with Rikka this morning. While I did succeed in surprising Rikka, the shock therapy element of the strategy was a complete failure.

"So cool! You should stay like that forever!"

The only outcome of the strategy was being praised by Rikka.

²⁶ An untranslatable pun related to her name, Tsukinami (月並). One definition of 月並 is "commonplace": the pun here is that similar to the student council's lack of authority, the student council president's name is also quite lacking.

To be frank, I don't think I would be able to stick with wearing this like Shichimiya does given how hot wearing it makes me feel. I'll seal this power up again once when the Devish Truth Stare is restored.

When I think about it, Shichimiya really is amazing. I really admire her.

But well, still – it's seriously hot.

"Hah."

I let out a deep sigh.

With this being the outcome, I couldn't say that this operation was very successful, could I? I'm at a serious loss for what to do.

What now? I'm troubled.

"Ahahahahahahahahahahahahahahaha!"

Laughing to the extent where I started to wonder if she had gone mad, she appeared. As she laughed, she struck my back with enough force that it made a bang. This was different to back when we had that "are we friends?" exchange from before. She really had struck me hard enough to the point where an audible "bang" could be heard.

Still, she arrived at school later than expected.

Shouldn't the class rep be the first one to arrive, I wanted to quip.

The class rep. No, the class king.

"The heck is up with that! Ahaha, why is your hair all spiked up!? Ahahaha, why are you wearing a cloak when it's so hot!? Ahahahaha, it's hilarious! As hilarious as the golden eraser you use!"

"Leave the golden eraser out of this!"

It was a treasure Rikka gave to me as a New Year's Gift!

With an "Eww, yikes, no need to get so angry~" sort of smile, Nibutani Shinka sat in the seat adjacent to mine.

With no sign that she planned to stop laughing soon, Nibutani, in this classroom where no one made a comment about my attire (the fact that not a single soul said anything made me think, "Hmph, are you all scared of my appearance?"), did not hesitate to come and make fun of me.

Although it was to make fun of me, the fact that she came and got involved with me made me feel a little saved.

"So, why are you wearing that? Did the heat turn you into a complete idiot? Ahahaha, or did you get forced into it? Is it for a punishment game or something?"

“...S-shut up! I am the Super Dark Flame Master right now. If you draw too close to me, you’ll get burnt!”

“Ahahahaha! That’s so tacky!”

Nibutani continued to laugh.

Surprisingly, Nibutani was the type of person who laughs quite readily. She also laughed like this (or to be more accurate, she also laughed at me like this) back at the cultural festival afterparty.

Hmm, looks like it’s time to make good on my promise.

“You burned?”

“Hah? I’ll kill you.”

I was threatened. Scary!

Since I remembered that saying that line made you laugh, I thought that me saying it would make you laugh even more, but...

Or more importantly, what’s up with your foul-mouth nowadays? It’s gotten even worse than before. You’ve been openly badmouthing me ever since the cultural festival. If it wasn’t “drop dead”, it was “I’ll kill you”.

Moreover, you only say those sorts of things to me.

Good boys and girls must never copy her. Words like that are hurtful.

Then again, since I haven’t seen her talk with other boys much (even when moving up a grade, she was still the centre of the class), I couldn’t definitively state that I was the only one that she treated that way. Still, from what I’ve heard, it seems that she’s quite kind to everyone else.

Well, whatever.

I’ve already grown accustomed to her foul-mouth by now. And besides, she was the only friend from my class last year who was in the same class as me this year. A friend whom I shared an eternal connection with. I should be big-hearted about this.

“So, Yuutan? Why are you wearing such a gross outfit?”

Yuutan – it goes without saying, but I was Yuutan. I’m not sure why, but my nickname had been changed recently. The first to start calling me by that nickname was Sasa of the “Summers”.

As the two of us were in the same class again this year, Sasa and I started talking to each other a lot. As a result, Sasa started to call me Yuutan (honestly, I was very happy that she recognised me as “Togashi Yuuta” and not just “Rikka-chan’s boyfriend”). It seems that nickname caught on with Nibutani as well.

Whether it's Geruzoni or Yuutan, I don't really care what you call me, but I can't leave you calling my outfit gross go unchallenged. This was my new power that I had received from Shichimiya.

You should be saying that it's super cool.

However, since I'm pretty sure that Nibutani will never say something like that even if I begged her, I'll give her a half-hearted sort of reply instead.

"You see, I don't seem to have much of a presence at all. And so, I thought I'd do something that would make me stand out. Give myself a new look."

To be frank, my lack of presence was something that I am pretty concerned about. In fact, I've been concerned about it ever since middle school.

Me too! Take a picture of me too! At this rate, photographs of me might not even be part of the yearbook!

No one else even commented when I came in wearing this! No one!

"Ahahahaha, it certainly is true that your presence is quite thin, isn't it? Despite the fact that you have decent looks, decent grades, decent communication skills, and decent specialty."

"A compliment from Nibutani...Eh...?"

Well, she was calling me "The Ordinary!" through.

Nowadays, one's not really anyone noteworthy unless they're exceptionally skilled at something, are they...

I mean... The people around me have quite the strong presence...

While the person who has the strongest presence would probably be one of the two upperclassmen, the person who has the least presence after me – surprisingly, that person might be Shichimiya. Deep down, she's actually quite the serious person. Well, all this is just my opinion through.

Still, although it is a bit late, those club activities of mine should have left quite the impression on people.

"Well, I don't think what I said was a compliment. But I also don't think what I said was negative either. Being normal. Even if it means having a weak presence, I think that mastering being normal does have its advantages."

"How would you master something like that..."

Should I be studying the art of guiding gazes...?

I can't think of a situation where mastering being normal would be useful...

"So? What's the real reason?"

As she asked that, Nibutani had a huge smile on her face.

I felt like I could hear her thinking, “Tell me the truth. If you don’t, I’ll kill you.”

But.

Nibutani was also – well, how should I put it? Observant?

I felt like I could also hear her thinking, “Well, if you need someone to talk to, I’m more than happy to lend an ear” – that was the sort of expression she had. As expected of the person who was our class’ most popular person and our class rep: she’s thoughtful and caring.

Well, it wasn’t like this was something I needed to hide, so it should be fine if I talked to Nibutani about it.

“Um, well, have you heard about what’s happened with Rikka?”

“Takanashi-san? No, I haven’t heard anything. Did something happen? Ah, did she finally dump you? Oh, and so, the reason behind you dressing like that is because you gave in to despair? Ahahaha, how pitiful~! Do you need someone to comfort you?”

“You’re completely wrong! No, see, Rikka’s Devilish Truth Stare has disappeared and her eye’s normal now, but...”

“Hah? You mean, so that’s the reason why you’re dressed like that?”

Nibutani looked completely dumbfounded.

The reason why I didn’t tell her the truth in the first place was because I thought she would react like that.

“It’s not just that! It’s a big incident, okay!”

“Ha... How stupid. Give me back the small bit of worry that I had.”

“Eh, you were worried!?”

“Err... obviously? I mean, what would you think if I suddenly started wearing cosplay and started looking like I was lost in my own thoughts?”

“There’s no need to be that worried about me!”

Besides, there’s no way that you’ll ever be in a situation like that.

Still, wearing cosplay? Am I a cosplayer now? Well, with how I’m dressed, I can’t really refute that.

Wait, hold on. If something like that did happen, it certainly would be true that I’d be worried, but –

“It’s true that I’d be worried, but I’d be okay with it! In fact, please dress like a cosplayer who looks lost in their own thoughts!”

“H-huh!?”

Nibutani was baffled by this sudden request of mine.

Mwahaha, don't think that you can keep toying with me forever. For right now, I am the being who was willing to do anything for Rikka, the Super Dark Flame Master. This shall be my revision to my existing strategy.

Since things have become like this, I'll involve Nibutani!

No, but honestly, this might actually be a good idea.

I've received help from Nibutani regarding Rikka so many times now. She was someone I wanted on my side.

“Look at it from another point of view. When someone with a faint presence like me dresses like this, you're the only one who chided me. However, what if someone like you, the class' most popular person by a longshot, started to dress in cosplay and appearing lost in your own thoughts? Rather than making anyone worried, wouldn't everyone be delighted instead!?”

It did pain me to say that.

However.

“E-eh!? Ah, well, that is true, isn't it!”

Nibutani fully agreed with me; it appeared that she was being swept up by how energetic I was. Alright, looks like there's nothing but to keep pressing her here.

“Right? And so, to help Rikka – won't you clad yourself in a new power together with me!?”

“No.”

An instant refusal.

Hmm, guess that didn't work out.

Well, I mean, her refusing was to be expected. I thought I would be able to get her to just go with the flow and agree with how energetic I was, but I guess not.

“Haa... Isn't that stupid? I mean, with Takanashi-san – isn't she just moving on from chuunibyou?”

Nibutani unexpectedly delved straight into the matter at the heart of this conversation.

Well, rather than saying that she had delved into the matter at the heart of this conversation, it would be more accurate to say that the conversation had progressed onto its main subject.

“You think so too, right?”

“I –”

To be frank, I had not been entertaining that idea in my mind much.

That Rikka’s moving on? Or rather, that she’s evolving?

I can’t exactly pinpoint why, but deep down, I was convinced that neither of those were the case.

No, that’s not quite correct.

Perhaps it would be more accurate to say that I was trying to convince myself that neither of those were the case.

Did I not want for Rikka to move on from chuunibyou? However, I do think that moving on from chuunibyou is inevitable. That’s why,

“To be honest, I don’t quite know.”

was the only sort of answer I was able to give.

However, I did have something to add to my answer.

“As her boyfriend – I don’t think quite that is what has happened. I’m confident that – no, to tell the truth, I’m still not certain of it myself. Still, even though I’m not quite clear as to what had happened, there must be something that I’m able to do, and so...”

“Hmm. Well, if I may be frank – no, it’s not like I didn’t want to say this, but – I can’t really say that I dislike where you’re coming from, Yuutan. The only thing you have on your mind is your girlfriend. I think that it’s a good thing that you’re so devoted. Things like affairs are unforgivable no matter what!”

“Seconded!”

I never expected Nibutani to be a kindred spirit.

Actually, more than just being kindred spirits – Nibutani and I seem to resemble each other quite a lot in terms of personality... Not only were we both former chuunibyou patients, we also share the same views on such a weird topic. Were our similarities the result of our eternal connection?

Could our relationship now really be a continuation of one that we had in a previous life?

“However, that the only thing you have on your mind is your girlfriend – I detest that sort of dullish thinking.”

“Huh?”

The abrupt addition of her disapproval made me think about the meaning behind her words.

Was there a double meaning behind her words – was she telling me to look at things from a broader perspective?

Nibutani let out a long sigh.

“Like I stated earlier, my position is that Takanashi-san is returning to how she was before is good. Moving on from chuunibyou – is that not a good thing? Or are you saying that she’s not allowed to move on?”

“No, er...”

This was the part that I was stuck on.

Naturally, I didn’t think that she couldn’t move on. I was in no position to tell her that moving on from chuunibyou was not allowed. I too had moved on from chuunibyou after all.

Moreover, it’s not like Rikka moving on from chuunibyou will change our relationship with each other.

While I may not be her contractee anymore (I can’t really say for certain this until I hear back from the Devilish Truth Stare), Rikka and I will still be girlfriend and boyfriend.

On the flip side, however, it wasn’t like my position was “come on, move on from chuunibyou already” either.

Regardless of my position on Rikka moving on from chuunibyou, I guess when it comes down to it, the reason why I’m still uncertain about it boils down to my belief that there must have been some sort of cause that led to the Devilish Truth Stare’s disappearance.

From my point of view as her contractee – er, I mean, boyfriend – who had spent the not inconsequential time of a year together with her, I did not think that she would move on from chuunibyou without a reason.

Although I stated that I wasn’t confident in this conclusion a little while ago – I believe that this belief of mine was what laid at the heart of my uncertainty.

It is impossible for Rikka to move on from chuunibyou without there being a reason behind her moving on.

That’s why.

If I was able to understand the cause –

“Good morning~. What’s the occasion, Yuutan? You’re looking super cool today~.”

“Good mooorning. Ahaha, there’s always something interesting going on with you, Togayu, isn’t there?”

I heard two voices call out to me.

Turning towards those voices, Sasa and Miyoshi-san came into my view. They had arrived just before the bell.

By the way, “Togayu” was another one of my nicknames that they had for me. It appeared that Miyoshi-san was also able to recognise me as more than just “Rikka-chan’s boyfriend”. That honestly made me super happy.

“Mori-sama too, good morning~.”

“Mori-sama, good mooorning.”

With Sasa in the seat in front of me and Miyoshi-san in the seat to the left of me, the two of them exchanged morning greetings with Nibutani.

Summer Triangle – Completed. I was completely encircled!

And we were at the very back of the classroom too, so there was no escape!

For two months, from the start of my first term as a second-year student until now, I had been a victim of this encirclement.

And so, today as well – at the same time she sits down in her chair and places her school bag on her desk (she’s showing no sign of even preparing for the first period!), Sasa turns back towards my direction and –

“So? What’s the occasion? What with the super cool outfit~?”

– *complimented* me.

That she unironically stressed that she thought my outfit was cool made me super happy...

That’s right. Sasa’s a good person who, one way or another, agrees with me on things (or at the very least, does not disagree with me on things). As such, I started to talk with Sasa a bit more recently.

Considering the context of our relationship, she was surprisingly easy to talk to.

Among the Summers, she was the nicest person out of the three.

And.

“Hmm, whether you think Togayu’s outfit is cool is really dependent on your tastes, isn’t it? Is this the sort of thing you like, Mori-sama?”

Grin.

As she said that, Chi-sama – aka Miyoshi-san – deliberately flashed a huge smile at Nibutani.

As an aside, the reason why Nibutani was being addressed as Mori-sama was because in the previous year, Miyoshi-san had declared, “Since my name’s Chinatsu, I’m ‘Chi-sama’²⁷,

²⁷ Exactly the same pun as Shinka being Mori-sama. Chinatsu (千夏) can also be broken down into Chi-summer, which is then distorted to Chi-sama.

right? And since I'd like for everyone to call me 'Chi-sama', it's only fair that I call Shinka 'Mori-sama' too."

If it were someone like me declaring that, Nibutani would probably say something like, "Don't call me Mori-sama!" However, with Miyoshi-san being the one who declared that, it appeared that Nibutani was unable to raise any sort of objection. Interestingly, there appeared to be some sort of hidden hierarchy among the Summers. While I don't know whether Sasa is higher up in the hierarchy than Miyoshi-san, Sasa usually uses Chinatsu when addressing Miyoshi-san.

Naturally, with me being at the very bottom of the hierarchy, I use Chi-sama when addressing her. I do call her Miyoshi-san in my heart, however.

Among the Summers, she was the most influential of the three.

"No no, there's absolutely no way that I would like an outfit like this! This isn't the sort of thing I like!"

As she said that, she, the person who was toyed with the most among the three Summers, waved her hands vigorously in denial as if to say that the very idea that she liked my outfit was unthinkable. One could almost see the steam coming out of her ears.

I too more or less nodded in agreement. Although we were both former chuunibyou patients, Nibutani and I were not part of the same faction.

If I had to compare her to someone else, Hideri-senpai seems to be closest to Nibutani in terms of views on special abilities.

"Ahaha, again with you saying that sort of thing. While you're acting as if you find it ridiculous on the outside, deep down you're thinking something like, 'That outfit works, doesn't it? Even though it looks sweltering wearing it, that outfit – it's oozing in manliness.'"

"No~, you don't get it~. It certainly does look hot to be in – that's exactly why it oozes with manliness~. So? Is today this school's Halloween or something~?"

"....."

It's amazing how one could say the words "this school's Halloween" without it feeling out of place.

"It certainly would not be out of place for this school to hold a Halloween event in June." While thinking that, I looked at my attire.

I certainly was dressed quite Halloween-like. It's a prelude to Halloween – while I certainly could have said something like that to gloss over the way I was dressed today, I did also want to hear what other people's opinion were about the situation with Rikka. Especially Sasa's opinion. She was a good person, after all.

And so, with all that in mind, I earnestly went through everything that had happened with Sasa and Miyoshi-san.

“You see...”

Unlike Nibutani, Sasa and Miyoshi did not look repulsed as I spoke: rather, they appeared to listen to me in earnest.

“Hmmm~, so it was for Rikka-chan’s sake~. Well, while I do think that your costume is cool, I also think that your reason for wearing it is also cool~.”

“I see. So that’s what Mori-sama loves about you.”

“I’m not in love with him!”

“Eh? Mori-sama’s in love with Yuutan~? For real~?”

“Seeing how worked up you’re getting about this is making me quite suspicious.”

“Who are you saying is worked up!”

Still enclosed, the conversation continued flowing on around me.

Then again, this was how things usually went.

“Well, I understand the situation now!”

As if to interrupt the flow of the previous conversation, Miyoshi-san nodded strongly as she abruptly interjected.

Moreover, it appeared that Miyoshi-san couldn’t completely hide the mischievous scheme she had in mind as – no, judging from how wide her grin was, it was probably more accurate to say that she had no intention of hiding what her true intentions were.

“Mori-sama is good with these sorts of stories. After all, Mori-sama has been sought after for love advice so often to the point where one could plausibly say that Mori-sama is running a love consultation service.”

“Eh!?”

Nibutani’s eyes sprang wide open in surprise.

It seemed like she was the only one surprised to hear that, however.

“Ah~, it certainly is true, isn’t it~? Mori-sama is quite good with these sorts of things~. Everyone does keep looking for Mori-sama for consultations after all~.”

“No, well, that’s.... Or rather, isn’t love consultations irrelevant to the topic at hand!?”

“No, it’s related alright. It’s likely that Rikka-chan is worried about something, right? If you hear Togayu out, Mori-sama, you’ll be able to find out what caused Rikka-chan to become like this, wouldn’t you?”

“Ah~, I see~. That certainly is true~.”

“No, but...”

“Moreover, don’t you always say, ‘I-I can’t just abandon a person in trouble!’ while giving off a really prickly sort of feeling? Right now, Togayu is in trouble.”

I believe it’s commonly said that whenever three women gather, it becomes quite noisy²⁸.

For a while now, there had been no room for me to enter this conversation at all!

Still, I do admire how Nibutani is always so Nibutani-like: how she always looks after others much like a mother. I was a little bit like that too. Woah, that’s another personality trait that I’m unexpectedly similar to Nibutani on.

Perhaps the reason why I don’t have much of a presence is because of Nibutani.

When I think about it, I sort of am the shadow to her light.

I’m guessing that she’d prefer dying over having others think that the two of us were linked in that sort of way, however.

“Moreover, this is an opportunity, isn’t it? An opportunity to ensnare Togayu.”

“Ensnare!?”

This time, I was the one who cried out in surprise.

Eh? No way. I’m scared. Although it felt like it was probably too late, I did not want to at Nibutani’s mercy.

“Ah, you’re wrong, you’re wrong. See, for the student council elections being held in September, Mori-sama was –”

“Ch-chi-sama, that’s –”

“– thinking of running for the position of the Student Council President. That’s why, even if it’s just by one, she would want to gather as many supporters as she could, right?”

Completely ignoring Nibutani’s objections, Miyoshi-san finished what she wanted to say while a smile.

How pitiful, she was being toyed with. That being said, I understood the logic behind it.

It certainly is true that even if it’s just by one, it’s good to increase the number of people voting for you. For someone as popular as Nibutani, I don’t think she needed my vote in particular. However, since I had no idea how people from the other classes – not to mention the other voting blocks such as the underclassmen – were going to vote, I could see why she would want to secure my vote. Assuming that Nibutani too was as much in the dark

²⁸ No equivalent of this pun in English. The kanji for noisy, 姦, is made up of three 女, the kanji for women.

as I am regarding the voting intentions of others, even a single extra vote would make her feel more confident in her chances of winning.

That being said, I would have voted Nibutani even without her ensnaring me.

"If Rikka-chan ran as a candidate, Togayu, you would vote for Rikka-chan, wouldn't you?"

"Urgh. That's correct."

Miyoshi-san's words hit a sore point.

In such a situation, I would vote for Rikka without question. Although I didn't think Rikka was interested in running for something like the Student Council President, I couldn't say that she wouldn't run for presidency for certain.

"That's why you should make Togayu be in your debt. Right? Mo. Ri. Sa. Ma?"

"Ah... Ugh..."

Nibutani-san hung her head. She had been completely toyed with.

They do say that everyone has people that their compatible and incompatible with...

Still, Miyoshi-san's ability to forcefully but skilfully push a matter through – I hope to be able to learn how to do that from her.

Although Nibutani Shinka-san had been in low spirits this morning, it appeared that she somehow was able to recover. She suddenly raised her head up with vigour.

"Oi, Geruzoni. You absolutely cannot mention a word to anyone about this."

"Could you not use that nickname when threatening me? Since it's been so long since I've last heard anyone call me that, it's a bit embarrassing!"

Habituation is scary.

Although I didn't particularly mind it when I was called Geruzoni in the past, hearing that name now makes me feel super embarrassed!

"Okay okay."

Nibutani sounded quite resigned as she said that.

"I will not abandon anyone. That is why, I will say it once more: I will become the student council president. I've changed from how I was before, haven't I? And so, let this be my first step towards achieving that goal."

"Oh~, Mori-sama is so cool~. I'll support you too~."

Sasa applauded Nibutani.

I too gave my applause to Nibutani along with Sasa.

"I too will give you my absolute support. Even if Rikka runs, my vote still will go to you, Nibutani."

"That's obviously, isn't it? So? What will you have me do?"

Beyond her line of sight.

That person – it was faint, but she had an evil smile on her face.

Chapter 8: Advent of the Devil Gal and Archangel Gal!

During the next break, the following conversation took place.

“Oh my, Takanashi-san. Your eye’s not its usual gold today?”

“Oof. Mori-sama. That’s none of your business, Mori-sama.”

“My name’s not Mori-sama. None of my business, huh? But Togashi-kun seemed very worried about it?”

“Ugh... That’s, err...”

“What’s wrong? Did something happen? Would you like to consult me about it?”

“W-well, um...”

“It’ll be fine. I’ll hear you out no matter what it is. Moreover, it’s me, the person who is synonymous with the term ‘love consultation expert’, the one and only Nibutani Shinka. My consultation satisfaction’s 95% and the first consultation is free.”

“T-this is some new sort of scam, isn’t it...! There’s probably some sort of super large contingency fee or something!”

“Ahaha, there’s no way I’d do something like that. After all, it’s not like I particularly – no, to tell you the truth, I am a bit worried about you. I mean, anyone would be worried if something that used to always be gold turned black all of a sudden, right?”

“...A-are they even edible once it turns black?”

“You’re talking about bananas! Why are you bringing up bananas!? Did your brain turn weird too, Takanashi-san!? ...That wasn’t what I meant to say. Let me try that again. Isn’t it a bit scary when something changes all of a sudden?”

“Something changing all of a sudden – scary, yes. ...Certainly, it can be terrifying when a banana suddenly turns black.”

“Like I previously asked, why are you bringing up bananas!? ...Whatever. Regardless, it seems that Togashi-kun too is quite concerned about you given the sudden change to your eye colour. And, well, even if you don’t want to think of it as a love consultation, I’m still willing to lend you my ear if you’d like. If you let me hear you out, I may even be able to give you some advice.”

“...R-right. What you’re saying does make some sense, I guess. Then... For, for just a little while – could you please hear me out?”

“Of course! Well, that’s decided then. And since you probably don’t want too many people overhearing, how about we have the consultation in your clubroom? No one would be there.”

"Mm, understood. That's fine with me."

"Good. Well then, how about we meet there during lunch?"

"Roger."

"...How she's behaving does feel really out of place."

"Hm?"

"Ah, no. It's nothing, it's nothing. Well, see you then."

Even accounting for the fact that the topic was extremely unnatural, it was still a very awkward conversation.

The sense of awkwardness I felt was mainly from Nibutani. The Nibutani that I knew wasn't the sort of person who would say something like "oh my". This time, everyone's established character traits was rapidly collapsing.

Then again, I haven't really seen Rikka and Nibutani talk one-on-one with each other much. They were quite the unusual pairing.

Most of the time when the two were together, either Shichimiya, Fuurin-chan, or one of the Summers would be present as well. That was probably why it felt a bit off when it was just the two of them.

Well, it wasn't like the two of them were on bad terms with each other. They just didn't have much to talk about when it was just the two of them.

Rikka was a chuunibyou patient. Nibutani was part of the chuunibyou rehabilitation faction.

After parting ways with Rikka, Nibutani came over to where Miyoshi-san and I had been eavesdropping on their conversation. The first thing that came out of Nibutani's mouth –

"No, wait a second. That person just now, who was that? That was horrifying. I'm even starting to think that I need to reconsider my own beliefs about rehabilitating all chuunibyou patients."

– was that.

Rikka's transformation made Nibutani tremble in fear.

This reaction was fresh. While I was shocked by Rikka and how she had changed, I wasn't horrified by the change. The other club members, while worried, were not scared of Rikka and how she had changed either.

Well, if Nibutani were to suddenly start behaving in a chuunibyou-ish manner tomorrow, I'd probably be fearful of her as well.

“For the time being, I’ve successfully carried out what you’ve told me to do. Still, why are we meeting up in that gloomy clubroom? Any empty classroom would have worked, right?”

“Ah, well, that’s, err, ah yes, because Rikka would probably feel at ease being there.”

I muddled my words as I tried to evade her question.

As I glanced to my side to check my response with Miyoshi-san, I could see a wide grin on her face.

Miyoshi-san – she somehow seemed to know that it was possible for us to peep into the principal’s office. She probably caught sight of one of Dekomori’s bodyguards and inferred that we could.

As for why I checked my response with Miyoshi-san – it was because I was terrified of her.

Since I too wanted to peep, she used that information to coerce me into agreeing with her strategy. And thus, that is how Miyoshi-san was able to get Nibutani to carry out the strategy that she had nonchalantly came up with.

“The principal’s office – is that not a good location? I personally thought that it was a perfect location for you, Mori-sama. The most! Prestigious! Place! Of! A! School! Is where?”

“...I guess you’re right. It certainly is a fine location, isn’t it?”

Miyoshi-san too skilled at manipulating others through flattery! And Mori-sama’s too simple!



And so.

In the present.

It was now lunch time.

In the waiting room adjacent to the principal’s office. In front of the monitor.

I was alone with Miyoshi-san. Unusual pairing number 2. I was really nervous. I’d likely be less nervous if Sasa was here with us (I again affirmed just how highly I depended on Sasa); unfortunately, however, it seemed that Sasa was at lunch with some other girls.

It appears that the three of them were not always together for everything.

“Nastuno’s quite the good girl, isn’t she? Even if she knew this was how things were going to play out, she would probably say ‘Ah~ This isn’t really my sort of thing~’ and not come along, right?”

“...In that case, are you saying that you’re a bad girl, Chi-sama? Are you the devil?”

“I’m not a bad girl. What makes you think that I’m the devil?”

“...I mean, a good girl wouldn’t make Mori-sama dress like that, would they?”

“Ahaha, that’s right.”

“Dress like that” – Nibutani was presently waiting in the principal’s office dressed in a mysterious angel costume.

“Rikka-chan seems to like this sort of thing, and so wearing something like this may get her to open her heart out to you. Right, Archangel Mori-sama!” With those words, Chi-sama, the devil, once again talked Nibutani into agreeing with her. Thus, Nibutani became a cosplayer.

The idea at the core of her plan was the same as what we at the club had come up with.

Nibutani was, as expected, initially against the idea of wearing the mysterious angel costume.

“No no, isn’t that costume a bit too much!?”

The devil, however, was able to persuade her.

“No, not at all. This is the costume that the dance club is planning on using next. Even though it’s the costume that the club will be using next, is the candidate for the club’s next president too shy to wear it?”

And thus (there was no hole at all in her plans!), Nibutani reluctantly agreed to becoming an archangel.

“Well, at any rate, that outfit suits Mori-sama. It looks great on her. Ahahahaha!”

“That’s true!”

Archangel Mori-sama – seriously, it fits her so well to the point where it’s funny how well it fits her. It felt in the same vein as the “person composed of light” evaluation that Rikka had of Nibutani a while back.

And the exact opposite of an archangel, the devil Chi-sama – with how delighted she had been about how things had turned out, it seemed that her moniker fit her well too.

While the two of us were focused on how Nibutani was presently dressed, it appeared that Rikka had arrived at the clubroom.

“I’m here... What is up with your attire, Mori-sama!?”

“You’re the last person that I wanted to be surprised by my attire!”

“I think it suits you! You should wear it all the time!”

“I’d rather die than do that!”

The two looked quite close in that interaction just now.

Completely unlike the awkward conversation they earlier, the two of them were frank with one another.

Did the devil anticipate that the archangel costume would help break the ice between the two? Was this why she had incorporated the archangel costume into her strategy? If she had, she's amazing. However, given the wide grin plastered on her face, I had my doubts.

"I believe that the best of Mori-sama comes out when she is toyed with. That is why I need to toy with her more."

Miyoshi-san looked at me and narrowed her eyes even further as she said that.

She was terrifyingly convincing.

"Ah, I sort of get what you mean. And yet, the person herself doesn't seem like she's aware of it at all."

"Able to be toyed with is a beloved trait, right? Regardless of the group, having one member who is easily toyed with makes a huge difference, doesn't it? And when you're together with us, Togayu, that's an extra person that I get to toy with, causing things to be suuuper fun for me."

"...Like I thought, you're just having fun with the situation."

The devil Chi-sama appeared to be enjoying herself quite a lot.

I do wish that you could put yourself in my shoes and understand how it feels like to be toyed with, however.

"Still, Mori-sama is in love with you, Togayu. Honest."

"...Yeah, sure."

"Haven't you noticed? It's the truth that she barely talks to any other boys, right? Oh? The ever-popular Mori-sama only chats with Togayu? What could this mean?"

"I mean, well... Doesn't she only chat with me because it's easy for her to do so? Nibutani just toys with me and enjoys herself in the same way that you do, Chi-sama."

"But just the other day, 'If he hadn't been dating Takanashi-san, I would have confessed to Yuutan my love for him' slipped from Mori-sama's mouth."

"Eh!? That's a lie, right!?"

"Heh heh heh, that's right, it was all a lie. Still, your face has turned bright red. Did you believe me?"

The devil cackled as she spoke.

I'm being completely toyed with... played with... messed with...

She managed to have fun at my expense three consecutive times...

“Still, Togayu, supposing that you broke up with Rikka-chan, I think that rather than Shichimiya-san or Rainbow-haired-senpai, you’d end up dating Mori-sama. It’s my woman’s intuition.”

“Sorry, but the very premise that Rikka and I would break up is an impossibility.”

“Heh heh, that’s true, isn’t it? Poor Mori-sama, you’re completely unaware that you’ve just been rejected – heh, this perfectly fits the character archtype I use to mess with her. Anyway, now that I’ve had my fun, let’s go back to commentating on what’s actually happening.”

“Come on now”, Miyoshi-san gestured as she turned around to gaze at the monitor.

Commentating on what is actually happening...

Without raising a retort, I too returned my attention to the monitor.

In the clubroom, as if the two were having a formal interview, Rikka and Nibutani sat facing each other in a very prim manner. The two of them looked as if they were having a serious consultation. One person’s outfit, however, did look quite out-of-place.

“So – although you’re not sure why, you’re presently in a situation where you don’t have any powers. Is that correct, Takanashi-san?”

“Yes...”

It appeared that a status report on Rikka’s present situation had just been completed. Nibutani nodded solemnly as Rikka gave her a somewhat sad nod.

“I see. Still, it’s not like losing your powers is a bad thing, right?”

“It’s not a bad thing?”

“Well, even if you don’t have any powers – it doesn’t change a thing, does it?”

“Y-yeah. That’s true... But–”

Rikka seemed to hesitate for a moment.

However, she pressed on with her words.

“I need to change a little, don’t I? That’s why... Because you seem to be an expert in the field of love... I’m asking for advice. What do you think, Mori-sama...?”

I was stunned by Rikka’s words.

She had never mentioned anything along those lines to me before.

Rikka thinks that she needs to change...?

“Is your relationship with Togashi-kun becoming stale?”

“Nope. We’re still head-over-heels in love.”

"I'm pissed! What were you being all somber for!"

Nibutani got mad and struck the table in front of her. However, after seeing how shocked Rikka was, Nibutani apologised for her actions, cleared her throat, and returned to the prim way that she had been sitting before.

Well, haha, it is true that the two of us were still quite lovey-dovey with each other.

"...At any rate, it's good that your relationship is going well. So then, what makes you think that you need to change, Takanashi-san?"

"That's –"

"This is completely off-topic, but can you believe that Mori-sama is calling herself a relationship expert even though she's never been in a relationship herself? Ahaha, this is just too amusing. I definitely have to tease her about it next time."

"Did you really have to bring that up now!"

Miyoshi-san interrupted with a comment that had nothing to do with the matter at hand!

Then again, given the number of times that it had happened, it could be that she was doing it on purpose.

Regardless, it appeared that Rikka was, unfortunately enough, at a loss for words again. While it was good that I didn't miss anything she said, it still meant that I had no idea about the true meaning behind her words.

"I just do. Or, well..."

"You just do, huh?"

After hearing Rikka's answer, Nibutani rested her chin on her hands as she mulled over a response.

After thinking for a few seconds, Nibutani –

"Well, this is what I think. I don't believe that humans change suddenly. I believe that a lack of change is what makes humans human. If humans did change, things like wars would not exist –"

".....!"

Rikka listened to the enigmatic speech that Nibutani gave out of the blue in earnest. Over where Miyoshi-san and I were, however, the speech had caused a burst of laughter.

"Ahaha, this, this! This is what I wanted to see! Mori-sama was bound to suddenly say something cringeworthy... Ah, my stomach..."

"Yes, it was bound to happen, wasn't it?"

The incident where Nibutani said "eternal connections" came to mind.

Well, it wasn't like I thought worse of her for it. It was part of what made Nibutani Nibutani. Then again, maybe I only think that way since there was a part of me that sympathised with that side of her.

"Even during club activities, she would sometimes say things such as 'Dance is sort of like the map illustrating the future of life, right?' Jeez, I'm already having a hard enough time holding back my laughter even without you saying such things. Well, since Natsuno usually says something like 'Ooh~! What a wise saying~', I'm able to just barely hold my laughter in."

"Your club activities sound like a lot of fun."

It seems that each of the Summers keeps the other in check.

If any of them were missing or if there was another person added in the mix, it wouldn't be the Summers anymore. What a beautiful friendship they had. It's wonderful, the friendship girls had with one another.

"However, I still don't get why you feel like you need to change, Takanshi-san."

Nibutani continued with her words.

I have to concentrate on what was on the screen.

"'Everyone around me seems to be moving forward. As for me – huh? I haven't grown at all.' That's the sort of feeling you have, right?"

"Yes, that's it."

Rikka nodded strongly to Nibutani's words.

It seemed that there was some part of her that resonated with what Nibutani had said.

"But you know, from what I can see, that isn't the case at all. From my point of view, you have grown a lot, Takanashi-san. On the contrary, have there been any meaningful changes in my life since I became a high school student? No, I haven't made any progress on that front at all. Maturing from how I was as a middle school student – I haven't been able to do it."

"....."

"Still, at the end of the day, change isn't something that happens abruptly. People don't suddenly mature. That's why – I think it's best if people grow and change at the pace and direction that they want. I too plan on doing just that."

"...Right."

As if to signal her agreement, Rikka gave a deep nod.

“W-well. For the time being, Takanshi-san, you should start by regaining your powers. Togashi-kun would likely be worried otherwise. It’s the classic example of being worried by a sudden change.”

Suddenly becoming self-conscious over what she had said, Nibutani quickly jabbered those words out and sat down in a hurry.

That was very innocent and cute of her.

What’s more, it matched her angel costume.

“Yeah, I’ll also –”

Right then.

The very moment when Rikka was about to reply to Nibutani –

“De-de-deko-deko-deko!?”

A voice burst into the room.

An unknown person’s silhouette was displayed on the monitor – well, although I say unknown, I know of only one person that would that sort of happy-luck-go tune while making an entrance.

It appears that Dekomori had come to the clubroom at a time where no one was meant to be present.

With Dekomori’s appearance, the clubroom devolved into chaos.

“M-master!? What are you doing-death!? And who is this-death!”

“E-e-e-ehhhhh!? Me!?”

The person most shaken by this turn of events was Nibutani.

An unknown underclassman had entered the clubroom that had been chosen as the meeting spot on the premise that it should have been devoid of people, not to mention the archangel costume that she was presently wearing.

It was only a matter of course that she was embarrassed.

“Ah, um, Dekomori, this is –”

“An enemy who is trying to seduce Master-death!?”

Without listening to Rikka’s explanation, Dekomori rushed in front of Rikka as if to defend her.

Dekomori was face-to-face with Nibutani.

“Bastard – who are you-death!”

Not knowing who Nibutani (archangel costumed) was, Dekomori pointed her finger at her. What a foolhardy thing to do. I could never see myself doing such a thing.

As for Nibutani, who appeared to be unable to contain how flustered she was, she –

“Heh, heh heh, I am an archangel.”

– said something stupid with a strained laugh.

She was so caught up in the chaos to the point where you could almost see small birds flying circles around her head.

Because of how utterly idiotic Nibutani’s claim was, the person next to me was besides herself with laughter.

I guess it’s good to see that someone was enjoying how things have turned out.

In response to Nibutani’s idiotic claim, Dekomori narrowed her eyes. It appeared that she very much doubted Nibutani’s words.

“Huh? You’re an archangel-death? With that jet-black-hippopotamus-like face-death!”

“Hah? I’ll kill you.”

“Eek-death! That’s not archangel-like at all-death!”

Nibutani scowled at Dekomori and threatened her. It seems that the blow from her enemy resolved the flustered state she was in.

As expected of someone who had been threatened by Nibutani, Dekomori recoiled from Nibutani in fear. She was visibly cowering.

But more importantly.

Jet-black-hippopotamus. The number of people who know the context behind that name was way too few.

“Dekomori, that person is not a jet-black-hippopotamus. She is Archangel Mori-sama. Furthermore, she is not a bad person.”

“M-master! No, but, anyone who looks as stupid as that must be a bad guy-death! Master, you’re being deceived-death!”

“Who are you calling stupid! You think I like being dressed like this!”

“If you don’t like it, why are you wearing it-death? Don’t you know-death? ‘A girl who does not like their own appearance is not a girl. The kanji for like would be written differently otherwise, right²⁹’-death!”

“...W-wait a minute. H-how do you know that saying...?”

²⁹ The kanji for like, 好, is written by combining 女 and 子, the kanji for girl.

Nibutani started to act unnerved again.

While trembling all over, Nibutani looked in Dekomori's direction with anxious eyes.

"Huh? That's what Dekomori want to ask you-death? Why do you not know of the wise saying written in the Mabinogion-death?"

"Wait, wait... You, why do you know about the Mabinogion?"

"Huh? You've been asking nothing but weird things for a while now-death. The Mabinogion – no, Dekomori cannot say anymore than this-death."

"Speak!"

"In the Mabinogion, it is written, 'Keep secrets. The secrets will strengthen you,'-death. That is why Dekomori is unable to say more on this matter-death!"

"Ahhhhhhhh! The author of that can go dieeee! Jeez, enough already! Hey you, you haven't shown it to anyone else have you!? No one else knows what's in there right!? It must be kept secret!"

"Obviously-death. Moreover, it is a family heirloom-death. A family heirloom is not something that is shown off lightly-death. While Dekomori does not show it off, Dekomori does reread it every night before going to sleep-death. The Mabinogion's creator shares her consciousness with Dekomori, strengthening Dekomori-death. And thus, sooner or later, with the Bible that created the world, Dekomori –"

"Ah, ah, ah, got it! I understand! Let's stop talking about it. Amazing, amazing, the Mabinogion is amazing! But you must never speak of it to anyone! Swear on the Mabinogion! Well then! It seems that I'm intruding on the two of you so I'm going to take my leave! See you later, Takanshi-san!"

Nibutani-san, whose voice cracked several times while she was talking, looked panicked. The moment she finished saying all that, she left the clubroom in haste.

In case it wasn't obvious enough by now, Nibutani was the author of the Mabinogion.

Anyone would have realised that much from the suspicious way she had acted up just now.

"Hah. As expected of Dekomori. Dekomori got rid of the bad guy, Master."

"R-right."

And yet, sure enough, Dekomori didn't realise it at all.

Well, I do think that obliviousness of hers is one of Dekomori's good points though.

Still, Nibutani-san – did you really leave such an embarrassing book behind?

Since she thoroughly ridiculed me about my Dark Notebook back when we were first years, I had not have expected for her to have made a similar blunder herself. Well, then again, everyone's probably made something like that.

Right – after all, I had one myself too.

That is why I will not comment on it.

That was the conclusion that I had reached.

“That girl's the heiress to the Dekomori conglomerate, isn't she? Heh heh, is there a video recording of the footage just now? I'll need to ask around a little about this next time.”

“.....”

As expected, the person next to me truly was the devil.

Chapter 9: The Goddess' Thoughts, The Goddess' Advice

Afterwards.

"Although I managed to hold a consultation session with her, I wasn't able to draw out much from her due to an unexpected interruption. Sorry."

I received the above status report from Nibutani.

On that note, since we had chosen to peek into their conversation (the fact that we peeked remains a secret), I felt that the failure to anticipate Dekomori's interruption was a major blunder from Miyoshi-san and my end. That's why, not only did I thank Nibutani for her help, I also apologised for the trouble I've caused.

Since I had gotten Nibutani involved in all this and caused her trouble, I thought I would offer to do something back to repay her. And so, I told her, "If there's anything you'd like me to do for you, just let me know." In response, Nibutani had a strange fixation on the word "anything" replying, "A-anything!? You promise!?"

She was so fixated about the "anything" that it made me fearful of what she was going to ask from me.

Then again, it was only thanks to Nibutani's efforts that I was able to hear a little of what Rikka was really thinking. It shouldn't be a problem if it's just one request.

In addition, even if she does request something ridiculous of me, I did unwittingly come across a weakness of Nibutani's. I should be able to leverage that as a shield.

At any rate, I wonder how Dekomori managed to get a hold of Nibutani's dark history. Well, it's not like there's any point in me thinking about it now – I'll just have to ask Dekomori for the answer the next time I see her.

Anyway, leaving all that aside for now.

There's presently something that's much more important for me to ponder over.

Rikka.

In the end, despite coming into contact with Nibutani Archangel version, Rikka showed no signs of returning to her former self. Then again, that was the expected outcome.

I wasn't expecting for the Archangel version of Nibutani to bring Rikka back to how she was.

It was merely the by-product of the devil's plan, after all.

The actual thing of import – it was Rikka's words.

"I need to change a little, don't I?"

It was the first time that I had heard Rikka voice that opinion since the loss of her powers.

This was possibly my biggest clue so far to as to her powers had disappeared.

Rikka – was she trying to change herself?

Could the disappearance of her abilities originate from her belief that she needed to change? Although I'm still uncertain as to what the exact cause was, I have the feeling that Rikka's words are a big hint to solving the mystery behind her power's disappearance.

Change. Alter. Transform.

If I had to point to what was most different about the current Rikka, only one thing comes to mind.

The Devilish Truth Stare's disappearance.

And with its disappearance – *Rikka herself had changed.*

In short, Rikka was trying to change herself...?

If that is the case, some of the things I noticed start to make sense.

Although her movements seemed to be more sluggish than usual, Rikka appeared to still have had a lot of fun in P.E yesterday. Even without the Devilish Truth Stare, being lively and full of spirit is a defining trait of Rikka's.

In addition, there was something else Rikka said that caught my attention.

Her answer to when she was asked whether she would like the Devilish Truth Stare to return – "I'm not actually too sure myself."

Could it be?

The current changes with Rikka – are they really just her wanting to be a normal girl?

The possibility of it being that – just wanting to be normal – isn't impossible. People commonly refer to it as "moving on". Shichimiya calls it "evolving".

It's a phase that everyone goes through.

Supposing, for argument's sake, it is that.

If Rikka *wants to be a normal girl* – hasn't everything that we've done up until this point been wrong...?

This whole time, have we been misguided in our actions...?

This whole time, have we just been getting in her way...?

A wave of anxiety washed over me all at once.

What was the right thing for me to do?

As I was pondering this, the bell chimed.

It seems that class has ended.

Although nothing the teacher said made it to my ear, I was still able to hear the bell. Normally, I'd start thinking that it was some sort of ability and would begin to come up with some sort of name for the ability (it's still something that I do to this day. Even though I've moved on from chuunibyou, I still can't seem to get rid of this habit), but I don't have time to do that right now.

Break time – with my plan being to peek on how Rikka was doing, I exited into the corridor. As I left the classroom, I locked eyes with Fuurin-chan, who was leaving the adjacent classroom at the exact same time.

Fuurin-chan!

Rikka's best friend, Fuurin-chan.

No one (including me) knows more about Rikka than her. Recently, the two have been close to the point of being inseparable. They were so close that even I, Rikka's boyfriend, was a little jealous of how close the two were.

And I had yet to ask that very Fuurin-chan about her thoughts on Rikka's current situation.

That I've yet to do so was a massive failing on my part.

Granted, there hadn't really been a chance so far for me to speak with her about it. Regardless, not listening to Fuurin-chan was not an option.

Since it's Fuurin-chan, there's a very good chance that she knew things about this situation with Rikka-chan that I never could have guessed.

I had to talk to her – and with that in mind, I rush over to Fuurin-chan.

"Hey hey, Fuurin-chan. How are you today?"

"Oh my, Yuuta-kun. So, you've finally come. You've kept me waiting."

While wearing her usual friendly grin, Fuurin-chan said those unexpected words.

Kept her waiting.

Unexpected was probably the wrong way to describe it – from the way she spoke, it was more like she had been anticipating that I would come to see her.

Well, it wasn't like that assumption was ill-founded. Should there be something strange going on with Rikka, it was only a matter of course to seek out Fuurin-chan's views on what was happening.

In that sense, I had actually been a little late.

“Oh, that’s right. If we stand and talk here, Rikka-chan might see us and get jealous. Let’s walk and talk instead.”

“Ah, okay.”

As prompted, I began walking with Fuurin-chan.

“Might see us and get jealous,” huh... The way Fuurin-chan worded it really made me think. Did she think that Rikka would get jealous of her seeing the two of us together? Or did she think that Rikka would get jealous of me?

Since the two of them have been hanging out together so much to the point that they were almost inseparable, it was honestly hard to tell.

For the sake of my sanity, let’s think positively and run with the first explanation.

At any rate, it appeared that Fuurin-chan didn’t have a particular destination in mind. She seemed to just be strolling around aimlessly down the corridor.

For the time being, as I was curious about Fuurin-chan’s thoughts on Rikka and the disappearance of the Devilish Truth Stare, I’ll broach the subject with her.

“Fuurin-chan, umm, about Rikka –”

“Yes, Rikka-chan! Super cute! Extremely cute! Ah, cute cute cute! I’ve been waiting a long time for you to raise this subject, Yuuta-kun! It’s a conversation that I can only have with you! The two of us, we’re the Rikka-chan Fan Club members no. 1 and no. 2! Ah, I’m member no. 1, by the way. And the club president.”

“...While I certainly can’t deny Rikka’s cuteness, and although I’ll concede the role of club president, that wasn’t what I –”

“Ehh, I’m the only one that you won’t have a fun conversation with!? With the other girls you’d engage in these fun conversations, but with me it’s just serious talk!?”

“You’re terrible~...” said Fuurin-chan as she pretended to sulk.

Even if you say that I was having fun conversations with all the other girls – that wasn’t actually the case in reality. We were being serious. Well, then again, it was true it did seem like we were just fooling around with the back-and-forth banter...

It definitely did hurt not being able to strongly deny her claim.

“Right, so, that’s why we should talk about Rikka-chan, okay? Let’s, let’s!”

“Well, while I too would love to talk with you about Rikka... speaking of which, you really love Rikka, don’t you, Fuurin-chan?”

“Ahaha, that’s right. I really love her. If I had to put how much I love her in words, it would be something like ‘the only one I love is you, Rikka’. You should have a careful read of my blog: I have a blog post under that name that details in length just how much I love her.”

“What a nostalgic-sounding blog title!”

Or rather, it was a line that I had said to Rikka before.

Did she hear about that line from Rikka...?

Since it is quite embarrassing, I would like for her to stop, but...

“Heh heh heh, futuristic yet nostalgic? Yuuta-kun, your chip has broken down, hasn’t it?”

“That wasn’t what I said, and I’ve already done that back-and-forth exchange just the other day!”

Did that line just come into fashion or something!?

I wasn't able to take you to it, the nostalgic future...³⁰

“Anyway, all this talk about futuristic yet nostalgic made me remember a thought that I had before: kids these days don’t know about in game secrets and cheat codes, do they? When I was racing Rikka-chan in a time trial the other day, she had no idea about how to unlock things like the End of Asceticism Mastery Skill³¹.”

“Wait, huh... we’re the same age, aren’t we...?”

Was she not part of the generation she had called “kids these days”?

I wonder if she was seeing herself as from a different gaming generation. Fuurin-chan was quite the video game enthusiast, after all...

Naturally, she had a MOX, the obscure video console that I was surprised Rikka owned.

In fact, she even had the MOX2.

I was a little shocked to find out that she played that racing game again and again on end.

I mean, was that really the sort of game a high school girl would play?

Since I’ve seen lots of high school girls playing taiko drumming games, I thought I knew the sort of games that high school girls would play, but given Fuurin-chan's tastes...

³⁰ A second and more direct reference to Zero’s dying words to X in the Megaman X Comic. 「連れていってくれよ...お前の...つくる 懐かしい...未...来...へ.....」 (loosely translates to “take me to... the nostalgic future... that... you... create...”).

³¹ This line (しゅぎょうのすええとくした わざ) is a reference to obtaining the Hadouken easter egg in Megaman X (in the Japanese version, Dr Light’s hologram goes on about training and working out under a waterfall and obtaining the body of a warrior when he presents X the Hadouken upgrade).

When breaking it down, yes, people will probably think that I'm a bit weird for having acrylic keychains of my girlfriend. Even so, the keychains were so well made that I couldn't help but want one. I even wanted to make one a family heirloom.

"Ahaha, guess you are a member of the Rikka-chan Fan Club. Alright, I'll give some to you. However, aren't you supposed to be in charge of promotional goods production? Please do your job properly from now on."

"Huh!? This is news to me!"

I've only just learnt of the existence of the Rikka-chan Fan Club today.

And yet, before I knew it, I was in charge of the production of our promotional goods.

Even though I'm only member no. 2...

"Ehehe. Still, with those promotional goods, if you place them in front of a desk that has a monitor displaying an image of Rikka-chan and prepare a birthday cake, you can hold a Rikka-chan birthday celebration party all by yourself!"

"Why not just celebrate Rikka's birthday together with her!"

What was the logic of celebrating Rikka's birthday like that!

"Eeeh, but Rikka-chan's already celebrating her birthday together with you, isn't she..."

"Ah... umm... Then let's celebrate it together, all three of us!"

"...Heh heh heh, I was just kidding around. Please celebrate her birthday properly with just the two of you. For an existence of my stature, celebrating Rikka-chan's birthday alone while using the hashtag 'TakanashiRikkasBirthdayCelebration' on my phone is more than enough."

"That's too self-deprecating!"

"Ahaha, that too was a joke~. That being said, don't hold back out of consideration for me and do celebrate Rikka-chan's birthday properly together with her. Since by then, I will have celebrated Rikka-chan's birthday with her the day before. I'll get to celebrate Rikka-chan's birthday before you do, Yuuta-kun! I'll get to wish her a happy birthday before you do, Yuuta-kun! She'll thank me for wishing her a happy birthday before you do, Yuuta-kun!"

"Eh!? Ah, in that case, I'll celebrate Rikka's birthday with her the day before the day before her birthday!"

Our conversation had devolved to the point where it was comparable to the conversations elementary school children had.

But still... Where did this sense of rivalry come from, Fuurin-chan...

“Ahaha! On a completely unrelated note, Fuurin-chan sounds very similar to Adulterer-chan³³, doesn’t it? It’s a perfect name for me.”

“You’re okay with being known as an adulterer!?”

What’s going on, Fuurin-chan!?

What’s causing you to be so self-deprecating!?

“No no, see, if it means I’m able to commit adultery with Rikka-chan then I’m more than happy to be called that. ‘I’m cheating, but with chime³⁴!’ she’d say!”

“Rikka would cry if you were to be such a deplorable character, so please stop...”

“Hmmm, that’s not good. Anyone who makes Rikka-chan cry is an unforgivable enemy. Even if that person is you, Yuuta-kun.”

“...I too wouldn’t be able to forgive such a Yuuta-kun either.”

Me making Rikka cry – the only time for that to ever occur is when I make her cry tears of joy!

“Wow, what a super cool line.”

“Don’t read my mind!”

“No no, but you said that line out loud, didn’t you?”

“Eh, seriously!? How embarrassing!”

“Ahaha! Alright then, now that we’ve had our fun –”

As Fuurin-chan was saying that, she trotted in front of me before turning around to face me. And with a smile on her face,

“– I guess I’ll listen to what Yuuta-kun has to say.”

Really, for me to have been sidetracked before I even knew it... Then again, I did have fun talking about Rikka, so I guess it was fine (suppressing line of thought).

Back to the main topic on hand.

“Fuurin-chan, do you have any ideas why Rikka’s powers have disappeared?”

“Hmm? Any ideas? But I have like thousands of them?”

“Thousands!?”

I would be terrified if she really had that many.

³³ Pun about the fact that Fuurin (風鈴) sounds similar to adultery (不倫, furin, ふりん).

³⁴ Continuing above pun. While the Japanese version plays on 不倫 sounding like 風鈴, this translation plays on with and wind (chime).

Or more accurately, I would be feeling so pathetic to the point of being on the verge of tears. There being thousands of possible reasons why Rikka has lost her powers, and yet I couldn't even come up with a single one!

"No no, me having tons of ideas shouldn't be this much of a shock? I am Rikka-chan's best friend after all. The sides of her that a boyfriend wouldn't know – it's only natural that there is lots about Rikka-chan that I know but you wouldn't, right? Like how Rikka-chan can be cute in this way, or how Rikka-chan can be cute in this way."

"Ugh... What you're saying does make sense, but... No, but even so, even if it is something that her boyfriend shouldn't know, if you know of a reason why she lost her powers, I'd like for you to tell me..."

"Hmm."

Fuurin-chan looked troubled in response to my request, with her smile from before disappearing.

"Mmm, that's right. While I am the president of the Rikka-chan Fan Club, I also do like you too, Yuuta-kun. Alright, I'll share what I think. I think – her 'thinking of Yuuta-kun' was why she has lost her powers."

As she said that, Fuurin-chan's face loosened back into a smile.

Fuurin-chan's words – they were very unexpected.

"Thinking of me – so for my sake?"

"Hahaha, well, it doesn't really matter to me whether Rikka-chan has powers or not. To me, the only important thing is that Rikka-chan is cute. Like I said earlier, I LOVE every kind of Rikka-chan. That's how it is for me. What about you, Yuuta-kun?"

'For me –'

But, just as I was about to say *it*,

"Teehee, this is exactly what I mean –"

Fuurin-chan spoke, as if foreseeing the words that I was about to say.

Well, rather than foreseeing, it was more like she interjected to stop me from saying *it*.

In a similar way to the earlier conversation about who would be first to celebrate Rikka's birthday – she didn't give me the chance to speak.

"And so, that's why, I believe that your answer is the right answer. Regardless of what your answer is, as long as it comes from you, Yuuta-kun, it is the right answer. You, Yuuta-kun, are Rikka-chan's boyfriend after all."

And with that, Fuurin-chan turn back around and started to move her stopped feet.

“Now then, it seems about time for us to start heading back. 6th period is about to start. Since I need to replenish my Rikka-chan levels before classes start, I’ll head back first, okay?”

Fuurin-chan waved me goodbye and headed back to her classroom first.

As for me, I was standing still thinking as I waved Fuurin-chan off.

Thinking of the meaning behind Fuurin-chan's words – the meaning behind ‘thinking of Yuuta-kun’.

I ruminated.

Kept asking myself.

Again and again. Over and over.

And yet.

The answer – I couldn’t find it at all.

Chapter 10: Yuuta's Answer

Even after returning to the classroom, I kept thinking about it.

Fuurin-chan – she wasn't the sort of person who would lie. And when it's about Rikka, the things she would come straight from her heart. There would be nothing false or fake about her words. She sincerely believes that Rikka is cute and earnestly loves her.

Plus, the person who would was her closest friend and would know Rikka best – it was without a doubt Fuurin-chan.

That's why, I couldn't get Fuurin-chan's words out of my head. "I think – her 'thinking of Yuuta-kun' was why she has lost her powers." Those words – they wouldn't leave.

After all, the natural conclusion drawn from her words.

Rikka's loss of her powers – *I'm the reason why.*

In other words, it's my fault.

Since Fuurin-chan's kind, I'm sure her phrasing it as "thinking of Yuuta-kun" was to avoid making me feel in the wrong.

Regardless – the cause was me.

The answer had been the exact opposite of what I thought it could have been up until now.

Of course, I hadn't been trying to avert my eyes. I genuinely didn't think I could have been the cause. When Fuurin-chan mentioned that she had thousands of ideas, I seriously did not have even an inkling of what could have been the cause. That's why I'm panicking like crazy right now.

I honestly couldn't think of anything.

What was it that I did to Rikka...?

What could I possibly have missed?

Since our class change, I have had an unusual amount of involvement with the Summers – and by extension, Nibutani. Could it be something related to that?

No, I doubt that's the case.

Rikka's the type whose feelings show quite easily, so even someone like me would notice if that were the case. Like the incident with Shichimiya.

On top of that, Rikka answered "head-over-heels in love" when Nibutani had asked whether she felt our relationship was in a rut, so the possibility of it being Nibutani-related was slim. Actually, scratch that: I can say for sure that it wasn't the case.

What else – could it be that I was too controlling?

No, that couldn't be true, or at least I think it isn't.

Although it wasn't something I could be certain of without asking the person in question, at the very least I've never said things like "Reply to my messages sooner!" or "So you were talking with that guy, huh?" to Rikka... The possibility of it being this was also very slim.

Other common reasons... (I'm still in the middle of class, but I'll look it up on my phone. Couple fight, reasons) A difference in opinion.

I don't think this is it either. As if through resonance, Rikka and I mostly share similar tastes with hobbies and favourite foods. With both of us having had chuunibyou, our favourite types of manga, anime, and games all overlap (I've heard that differences in anime preferences are a cause of many fights. Per Dekomori, when there's a disagreement over what's good, it will result in a fight. I think there was a time where she had a fight with Rikka over this. I didn't learn what the fight was about, however). The two of us don't really have foods that we dislike either (although if we dived into it deeper, I'm sure we would find some), with Rikka always commenting "it's delicious" no matter what I make for her.

The only hobby we didn't have a shared interest in was baseball, but this didn't seem to bother Rikka much at all.

In conclusion, the possibility of the cause being a difference of opinion seems rather slim too.

Then what is it!?

I don't think that I had done anything to hurt Rikka in any way. From what I can recall anyway, at least.

I can never say with absolute certainty of course, but up until the day Rikka had lost her powers, there had not been anything unusual with Rikka.

And even after losing her powers, she hadn't expressed any anger or frustrations towards me. There hadn't been anything like that at all. Not even an inkling.

The two of us were getting along extremely well. Head-over-heels in love.

And so – assuming that it was because of me.

Let's turn my thinking around.

Could it be because I 'did nothing' for Rikka?

That there was something I should have done that I didn't do.

.....

.....

.....

...

Nothing comes to mind.

Something that I should have but haven't done – it wasn't possible for me to come up with something from nothing....

Wait, is it even possible to find an answer to that...?

Now's the first time that I've ever thought about this.

Do all the boys in the world really understand this sort of thing?

Am I the only one that's utterly clueless?

Do all the boys with girlfriends in world honestly know exactly what their girlfriends are thinking?

If that was the case, I would love to be able to do the same.

Things would be perfect if I were able to do that.

I want to understand everything about Rikka – well, everything might be a bit hard...

No.

No no.

This isn't it.

Me not being able to read Rikka's mind and having not done something probably wasn't what was at the core of it.

Rikka's powers have disappeared because of me.

There must be a simpler reason for how I caused that – just as I was lost in that train of thought, a voice from beside me suddenly caught my attention.

“– this regular eraser that you dropped? Or was it this golden Togayu eraser?”

Chi-sama, who was sitting beside me, was teasing Nibutani with a big smirk on her face.

I hadn't noticed since I had been so engrossed in own thoughts, but it seems that class has ended. I also missed Nibutani dropping her eraser.

Or more importantly, I had been so engrossed in my thoughts that I even missed the bell... My pages of my notebook were pure white as well.

I ended up missing the last class of the day in a rather weird way.

“H-huh!? No, the eraser that I dropped was a normal one! Why did you bring up Yuutan!?”

“But Mori-sama, don’t you always look at Togayu’s eraser with such a longing gaze? Let’s be honest, okay? Honest people get both things, right? And if you do decide to be dishonest, how would I know?”

“E-eh!? No, the normal eraser is fine!”

“Hmm? Is that the honest truth? Hmm? Hmmmm?”

“Eh~? You’re going to give it to Mori-sama~? But I wanted to have Yuutan’s golden eraser~. It’s so cool~.”

Like usual, Mori-sama was being toyed with by Chi-sama.

Hang on a minute, that was my favourite golden eraser, so – no. No no. That wasn’t what was important.

The simpler reason – it’s so obvious now.

Why did that conversation catch my attention?

Normal one? Golden one? Dropped? Being honest?

Those words – they were, quite simply, descriptors of what had happened.

Yes – I had dropped it. Overlooked it.

Me.

My feelings.

And so, what I had subsequently lost –

Fuurin-chan had even hinted it to me.

That’s right – the answer had been there from the very beginning. All the way back when Rikka asked, “Today’s me... Is it no good?” When I didn’t answer her honestly.

Truly, how foolish of me.

“That isn’t something you’d normally ask.” “Not Rikka-ish.” Nothing like that was said at all.

To her “Is it no good?” – I didn’t give an answer.

I didn’t actually give a response to that question.

This was the cause.

And if I can be honest.

To me, the two Rikkas – *I love both of them.*

They are both Rikka, and both incredibly cute!

That being said – the one I fell in love with wasn’t the normal Rikka.

It was the golden Rikka.

Back when we first met – what started it all was her golden eye. The Devilish Truth Stare. I was completely bewildered at first, being suddenly forced into a contract. At that time, I hadn't moved on from chuunibyou like I have now. With Rikka reminding me so much of my old self, it had been challenging back then interacting with her.

I was embarrassed by her chuunibyou antics. Worried about how it would appear in other people's eyes.

And yet, despite that, the two of us spent time together, studied together, exchanged ridiculous-sounding email addresses with each other, messed around together, and became good friends with each another. And the more I learnt about Rikka, the more I felt the desire to always protect her. And then I fell in love with her.

It was this chuunibyou Rikka who I fell in love with.

However, the reason that Rikka had lost her powers – was me.

The exact reason why – to be honest, I still had no idea what that was.

And although I did ask earlier, I still don't know if Rikka even wanted her powers back.

There are so many things that I didn't know.

So many things – but!!!

Wishing for Rikka's powers to return.

It was a feeling I understood quite well. Because it was how I felt. From the very beginning.

I had pondered about it a lot – and had overthought things.

Did Rikka want to be a normal girl? What did Rikka want to do with her abilities? What was the cause of Rikka losing her abilities? These were all questions I thought long and hard about. Questions that, at the end of the day, wasn't what had been important.

What was needed was for me to be honest. For me to tell Rikka properly that I wanted her powers to return.

Telling her that had not been something I had been able to do.

I think that a part of me had been scared to tell her that. That was probably why it had taken me so long to arrive at this answer.

Chuunibyou – it is something that you move on from. That is my belief. And so, if I were to tell Rikka that I wanted her powers to return, it would be the same as me rejecting her attempt to move on. I would be selfishly denying her growth as a person.

That was something I didn't want to do.

Of course, if Rikka truly wanted to change herself, I would be properly accepting of her moving on. Needless to say, a Rikka who moved on from chuunibyou was still Rikka.

In light of my thoughts just now, this may seem a little contradictory, but I love Rikka. I really love her. I am in love with this person named Takanashi Rikka.

That's why, even if Rikka remains the way that she is now. Even if she changes further. My feelings of loving her will remain the same.

Regardless of what Rikka decides – our relationship will not change.

In contrast, there is no future for our relationship if I'm not upfront with Rikka about how I really feel.

Assuming I did tell her how I felt.

People like Dekomori might see me as a chuuni bastard who doesn't consider Rikka's feelings.

Rikka might get troubled by it. She might think of me as a selfish guy.

But even so.

I wanted Rikka to return to how she was before.

It's fine if she doesn't.

But at least once, I needed to properly tell her how I feel.

Right as I was thinking that.

A familiar voice called out to me from outside the classroom.

And by outside the classroom, I didn't mean the hallway.

The voice came from the window.

"Yuu-chan! You seem lost in thought about something special!"

Turning to look – by the edge of the window, as if having taken a cue from Shichimiya, was a person standing there with her arms crossed. That person's name – Amaniji Hideri.

Wait no, this was completely absurd. We were on the third floor. Hideri-senpai's classroom was the room right below us, on the second floor.

"What in the world are you doing!? And why from there!?"

In response to my retort, Hideri-senpai let out a fearless laugh.

"Heh heh heh... If there are special upperclassman who descend gracefully from the floor above, it wouldn't be weird for there to also be special upperclassman who climb frantically from the floor below, would it?"

"Yes it still would!"

Everybody in my class was taken aback by her entrance.

Well, Sasa may have been the exception. I heard her murmur, “Oh, so that’s the rumoured Rainbow-haired senpai~. How cool~.”

Either way, I couldn’t stand the “there’s a dangerous person” look that everyone seemed to be giving me. I rushed over to Hideri-senpai and pulled her into the classroom.

“Woah. Aren’t you the bold one.”

“I don’t want to hear that from you!”

As I said that, I dashed out of the classroom, pulling Hideri-senpai with me. Naturally, we left via the hallway. That there needed to be this sort of clarification must have been a world first.

No points for guessing whose fault it was as to why such a pointless clarification was necessary.

“Back to the point, what in the world were you doing? And why from there?”

“We already told you, didn’t we? Since we sensed your special feelings, we rushed over as soon as we could. And coming in from the window gave off a ‘not normal’ sensation, didn’t it?”

“You weren’t wrong – that seriously wasn’t normal! Also, this is the first time I’m hearing of you having such an ability! But more importantly, you’re crazy to be doing something that dangerous!”

“Oh wow, what kind words! You’re going to make us blush! But putting that aside for now – you were about to do something extraordinary all on your own, weren’t you?”

“Ack...”

How did she know...?

Was this the ability known as Seventh Seven...? The power of Seventh Seven that everyone feared...?

“Ha, it looks like you had underestimated our ability! Well, truth be told, we actually came as we thought it would have been around time.”

“Around time?”

“Heh heh, our own special ability. Oh, but enough about us. If you don’t want to tell us everything, that’s fine! That being said, you were planning on telling DevTru Rikka-chan how you truly feel, weren’t you?”

“...Well, yes, that was right. But how did you –”

“Of course we know. We are your and DevTru Rikka-chan’s upperclassman. Your special upperclassman!”

“.....”

There wasn't anything I could disagree with when she puts it like that.

Despite how she acts, she really was a reliable upperclassman. She took good care of her underclassman.

Her craziness aside, she was a kind-hearted upperclassman.

“Be honest with us, Yuu-chan: you want for DevTru Rikka-chan to go back to the way she was before, don't you?”

“...Yes.”

I answered honestly.

Just me staying true to my word.

“We see. To be honest, we too also want DevTru Rikka-chan to go back to the way she was before. While we don't mind the current DevTru Rikka-chan as she isn't exactly normal, we prefer the usual DevTru Rikka-chan more since she's more abnormal.”

Hideri-senpai nodded quietly as she said that.

I got the sense that these were her true thoughts – something Hideri-senpai doesn't usually show.

Given her display of earnestness, it was only natural that I too responded in kind.

“I feel the same way. That's how I came to the realisation that I needed to tell Rikka how I feel. Because if I don't – I wouldn't be able change together with her.”

“Mm. If you tell her how you really feel properly, we're sure that your feelings will reach DevTru Rikka-chan. But even if your feelings do reach DevTru Rikka-chan, it doesn't mean that she will return to the way she was before, does it?”

“Yeah, well, that's true. But that doesn't –”

“No, that won't do. Us? We're selfish. We really want for DevTru Rikka-chan to return to the way she was before. That's why we shall use a foolproof method!”

“Foolproof?”

“While we all have tried many different things, there are still a method that has not been trialled. A method of regaining what has once been lost – the method of waking Sleeping Beauty. A special method that has been around since the ancient times – the power of love!”

“The power of love!”

“The heck was she saying all of a sudden, this person” was normally my reaction to her sudden outbursts, but for some reason I found myself repeating after her this time. The power of love – it did have a nice ring to it.

Suddenly grinning, Hideri-senpai continued.

“Heh heh heh, this is the perfect chance, isn’t it? The perfect chance for you to give that to her.”

“That?”

“Playing dumb, are we? But we know. We’re well aware of what you have been up to during your winter and spring breaks.”

Hideri-senpai slowly took out her smartphone from her pocket.

She then showed me what was on the rainbow-coloured smartphone’s screen.

On the screen – an image of me working frenetically at my part-time job over the winter and spring breaks.

Hideri-senpai then slid her finger across the screen to go through the other images. Me. Me. Me. All of them were pictures of me taken either during winter vacation or spring break.

Hold on. The heck was this?

“You’re terrible, Yuu-chan! You abandoned the fun club activities life you could have had with the rest of us to go and enjoy your adolescence all on your own. Then again, we did get to see firsthand you hard at work. The pasta you made was delicious.”

“W-what! You saw me!? Or rather, how did you know about my part-time job!?”

“Social media. That’s how we knew.”

“Social media’s scary!”

It was the dark side of our modern society.

This was a case of stalking!

“Furthermore, we also know the reason why you were so hard. We too were connected to her. We’re friends on social media.”

“.....”

Seriously?

Social media’s scary. You never know who’s connected with who. Be careful, everyone!

But more importantly, how on earth did she find out about that? I hadn’t told a single soul about it.

“You can’t keep a secret from us! A guy suddenly starts a part-time job – there could only be one explanation for something special like that happening! So, you were planning on giving it to her sometime, right? If so, now’s the time!”

Even if she suddenly tells me to give it over, it wasn't like I could do it straightaway. I still needed to get mentally prepared.

No.

In terms of mental preparedness, I've been prepared ever since the day I've decided to buy it for her. There's no reason for me to hesitate. It's already been decided that I will give it to her properly. Naturally, this wasn't exactly how I planned on giving it to her, but the timing was not completely awful.

Like Hideri-senpai had said, now may be the time.

"...Things certainly have escalated quickly. However, that's fine with me. I'm starting to feel that now is the time as well."

"You giving that over to her – in other words, *you'll be doing that, won't you?*"

...For some time now, it felt like Hideri-senpai had been trying to lead me down a direction she thought was interesting.

Well, it wasn't like that was a bad thing. I'm sure Hideri-senpai was thinking of me – of Rikka and I – as she had said that. ...Probably. I couldn't say for certain if that was the case. But that I guess there being that sort of ambiguity about her intent was very Hideri-senpai-like.

Yeah.

I will be doing that. I had already vowed that I would do it.

It had just been a question of when.

I looked straight at Hideri-senpai and nodded.

"Right. I will be doing that!"

"Good answer! And so, about setting the scene for it: given that we formerly were a drama club, will you let us at the club help you out?"

"Involving everyone..."

Since I was the one who caused this whole situation in the first place, it really should be on me to resolve things. Then again, all the way up until now, everyone from the club had been lending me their aid and helping.

It would be rather presumptuous of me this late in the game to insist on resolving things all on my own.

Plus – I was really grateful to hear that everyone was still willing and wanting to help.

Simply knowing that everyone had my back made me feel unstoppable.

"If you are all willing, then I'd love it if everyone could all help. Please lend me your support – I'll make sure that my feelings will reach Rikka!"

Hearing my response, Hideri-senpai let out a delighted laugh.

On her face was the brightest smile I've ever seen.

"Heehee, just leave it to us!"

Normally, I would be a little worried hearing that from her.

This time, however, there was not a shred of doubt in my mind – I could leave things to her without hesitation.



10 minutes later.

Immediately after the final homeroom for the day.

Hideri-senpai had everyone assemble at the clubroom before club activities began.

Everyone except Rikka. And Shichimiya.

It goes without saying why Rikka wasn't contacted. As for Shichimiya not being notified, it was probably Hideri-senpai's way of being considerate. Hideri-senpai's kindness.

Kindness not towards me, but to Shichimiya.

Hideri-senpai was most likely aware of Shichimiya's feelings. As to how she got that knowledge – it most likely wasn't because of Seventh Seven. Probably.

Our past – the tale of the Demon Duchess and Hero – was not something that Hideri-senpai should have been privy to.

But even so. She probably knew.

That Shichimiya, even now, still had lingering feelings towards me.

I get that this sounded a little weird coming from me, given how dense I was. But I could tell. We've spent so much time together, after all. And the fact that someone like her had feelings for someone like me did make me very happy.

But that's exactly why I wanted to cherish her.

Since Shichimiya's Shichimiya, she without a doubt would help me out if I asked her to. *Even if it meant killing herself*, she would lend me her aid. That was the sort of person Shichimiya was.

Hideri-senpai knew that. She understands the sort of person Shichimiya was.

That was likely why Shichimiya had not been notified.

I wasn't able to confirm that reasoning with Hideri-senpai, however.

If I were to openly ask, I would be putting all the arrangements Hideri-senpai had made out of consideration for Shichimiya to waste. And so, despite being full of guilt, I decided to remain silent.

“Deko-chan, Kumin, thanks for arriving early. Ah, as for Shichimiya-chan, she has her own special timeslot, so she’ll be joining us a bit later. Spe-cial time-slo-t. That has a good ring to it!”

Once we had all arrived, Hideri-senpai opened with that explanation.

She had likely gone to the trouble of opening with that so that the others did not question Shichimiya’s absence.

I’m truly thankful to you, Hideri-senpai.

Hideri-senpai then continued on to explain to Kumin-senpai and Dekomori the course of events that had led to now.

Normally, I should be the one explaining the situation and asking for everyone’s help. But I guess from Hideri-senpai’s perspective, as she had been the one asking me if I would like the help of the other club members, it was her role as club president to ask the rest of the club.

And to be honest, it pretty much was a club activity at this point.

I was getting everyone in the club to help me out.

On top of that, what we would be doing pretty much fell into what could be considered our club’s club activities. There wasn’t much of a concrete definition as to what our club’s club activities were – as long as we were doing something that was special, it counted.

“– and so that’s the situation,” said Hideri-senpai, hastily finishing off her explanation. “That’s why we’re counting on the two of you. Thanks in advance!”

Kumin-senpai accepted the club president’s directive quite readily.

“Teehee, I love this kind of stuff, so count me in. In fact, come on!” she grinned. “I like love stories even more than I like baseball. Rather than the Carp, I prefer talking about love³⁵. I like talking about love as much as I like sleeping.”

Like talking about love as much as you like sleeping, huh.

It’s no exaggeration to say that sleeping is the thing Kumin-senpai loves most in this world.

And so, to hear her say what she did – and that she was going to help – made me incredibly happy. I needed to thank her properly.

“Thank you very much, Kumin-senpai. Well then, I’ll be in your care.”

³⁵ Love (恋, koi) shares the same pronunciation as koi (鯉), a type of carp. 鯉 in the context of Nippon Professional Baseball refers to the baseball team of Hiroshima Toyo Carp.

“There’s no need for such formalities. Rather, I’m looking forward to how you’ll be creating a romance movie-like heart-throbbing scene~.”

“Sorry to disappoint, but I’m not sure if I’d be able to pull something like that off...”

“Actually, now that we’re on this topic: it’s something that I’ve been thinking about for a while, but if it’s the Devilish Truth Stare Rikka-chan that you were in love with, couldn’t we say that you had an illicit love³⁶?”

“There’s nothing immoral about our love! It’s perfectly pure!”

“Oh? So it’ll be a romance movie-like heart-throbbing scene after all, right~? Since you are a member of a former drama club, you should be going in with the mindset of a lead actor in a heart-throbbing movie! And then, perhaps, you might start getting some acting offers?”

“As if that will happen!”

If I was handsome, I might have had a chance (sorry, but there was no possibility of that at all).

Since I was, as Nibutani puts it, just average looking, there was absolutely no way I was getting any offers.

Anyway, leaving the jokes aside for now.

Given how kind Kumin-senpai was, I had expected for her to say something along the lines of what she did and readily agree to help. What I hadn’t been sure about was the other person’s reaction.

Ah, but that wasn’t to say that I thought my underclassman wasn’t kind.

And so, I turned my attention towards that other person – to Dekomori.

With how swollen her cheeks were, it was clear that she was unhappy.

“Um, Dekomori-san...?”

Seemingly in reaction to my voice, Dekomori-san’s puffed cheeks deflated, making a “pwoosh” sound as it did.

“... Hah.”

Dekomori let out a massive sigh.

Then, while looking unhappy, disgruntled, and vexed, she continued.

“Well, if it gets Master to return to the way she was before, Dekomori wouldn’t say that she won’t lend to lend her aid-death.”

³⁶ A play on 邪 of 邪王真眼 (aka Devilish Truth Stare) being combined with love to form 邪恋 (illicit love).

“ ... ”

What a roundabout way of saying yes.

She really was quite the cute underclassman.

Still, regardless of the way she phrases it – that she was going to help made me very happy.

“Thank you, Dekomori. To be honest, what I wanted to do probably wouldn’t have worked at all if I didn’t have your help.”

“Ah, right, got it-death. Dekomori understand the situation-death. It’s finally time to get serious, isn’t it-death? Alright, so, do we need to make it rain-death? In that case, we can use Dekomori Corporation’s Sea Hare-kun No. 2– ”

“You’re being too reckless with company technology!”

Seriously, just what kind of company was the Dekomori Corporation!

They even control the weather now?

Or rather, just because it’s a serious scene, it didn’t mean it needed rain.

Besides.

“I wasn’t looking for that kind of serious.”

So I said.

And, with as much coolness as I could muster.

“From now on – it’s nothing but love scenes.”

Chapter 11: Bring about a miracle! A vow of the highest grade!

The location selected for the final battle – it was the gymnasium.

It was the place at school that held the most memories for us. The place where the Demon Duchess and Hero fought. The place where the imprisoned princess was saved. With all the things that have happened there, the gymnasium being the location of the final battle was quite the perfect choice.

This time, however, I wanted for it to function as the place that turned delusions into reality.

And so, when school ended.

To avoid Rikka figuring what out was going on, I went home for a bit. For times like this, it was useful that the two of us were in separate classes. Once I completed my preparations, I headed back to school.

Then, once club activities had finished (today's club activities had ended with just idle chatter to distract Rikka from what was going on. Personally, I think it's good to have days where our club activity was just idle chatter) and everyone else had left, I sent Rikka a text telling her to come to the gymnasium.

As I had enlisted the help of Hideri-senpai, who had been able to stall Rikka with her eccentric behaviour, I had plenty of time to complete my preparations. I had also mentally steeled myself.

Bringing us to now. I was currently alone, in my Super Dark Flame Master (full armament) form, waiting for Rikka on top of the stage.

While it might not actually make much of a difference, I wore this outfit as I wanted to borrow the strength of the new power Shichimiya had given me.

Everyone's support – naturally, Shichimiya was part of that everyone as well.

Although I would have preferred having her direct support, it wasn't something that I could have asked of her. It wouldn't have been right for me to hope for her aid.

...Hope, huh. What a nostalgic word. It was all coming back to me.

Because this had been a place of great significance, I couldn't help but reminiscence about the past – as I was lost in my memories, the gymnasium door opened slowly.

In an environment that was dimly lit similar to how it was back then, the princess made her appearance at last.

"Yuuta? Are you here?"

The princess' – Rikka's – incredibly cute voice echoed throughout the gymnasium.

It may have been because it was so dark, but it seemed that Rikka had no idea where I was. She panned her head back and forth as she slowly made her way in.

Once she made her way to the centre of the gymnasium, she seemed to have spotted me (to be clear, her not noticing me was not because I had activated my “Fading into the Background” skill or anything). Her cute voice rang out once more.

“Ah, Yuuta. What’s the matter, telling me to come to a place like this. Is something up?”

“Yeah.”

After nodding in response to Rikka’s question, I jumped off the stage.

Thanks to the coaching of a former drama club and current mysterious club club president, I was able to make a pretty cool entrance. Then –

“Rikka – there’s something I need you to hear. I am going to undo the spell on you –”

I spoke with a deep voice, attempting to sound as handsome as I could.

Not to toot my own horn, but my voice just now was pretty much the voice of an ikemen³⁷!

I then made my way over to Rikka, strutting step by step.

Once I was only a few steps away from Rikka, I stopped.

It should be ready about now.

“Daydream System – activate!”

In response to my shout, the entire world changed. And I meant that quite literally – the scenery was no longer the gymnasium that we had been in just now. The world was transformed into one from my mental landscape – we were now in a church overflowing with sanctity.

It may have been a bit cliché.

Still, I thought I’d go with the tried-and-true method.

Faced with this *impossible phenomenon*, Rikka appeared extremely surprised.

“H-huh!? W-what do you mean by that!? Is all this your ability!?”

“No - this was a power that borrowed from Dekomori.”

That’s right.

³⁷ A Japanese term used to describe used to describe a particular type of hot guy. Typical traits include having a deep voice, being well-dressed and well-groomed, and giving off a sense of mystery.

With Dekomori's backing, I was able to borrow the Daydream System.

'Because the staging being special is crucial, right?' To carry out this suggestion from Hideri-senpai, I decided to ask Dekomori for her help. I never expected that being a test subject for the Daydream System would pay off like this...

Since it was necessary to specify the space, right now Hideri-senpai and Kumin-senpai were holding the machines running the Daydream System. It seemed that the two had split off into separate locations around the perimeter of Rikka and I to ensure that they remained hidden.

"W-woah! That's amazing!"

Although it did surprise her, it appeared that Rikka did not seem to find this situation strange at all.

Maybe she truly thought that all this was the result an ability. Although it had disappeared, she still was the user of the Devilish Truth Stare.

There had been that time where she had a duel with Shichimiya in a mysterious space that I couldn't see, hadn't there? Maybe that was why she was so accepting of this situation.

"Heh. Well, I am the Super Dark Flame Master right now. If it's for your sake – I can make anything happen!"

As I delivered that line in a cool manner, I put my right hand into my trouser pocket.

My level of mental preparedness – properly prepared.

From here on out, I have no idea how things will unfold. What happens next is a complete unknown.

Even so, I had decided to properly tell her how I feel.

I will tell her how I feel, regardless of the outcome. This decision won't change. My feelings won't change.

With this resolve in mind, I –

"Rikka, I –"

The moment I was going to tell her.

"Stop right there!!!"

That voice interrupted me.

"Nyahaha☆! *Let me join in on the fun!*"

Turning towards to the voice – standing atop the cross of the church I had created was the Demon Duchess. Naturally, she was in her usual imposing stance. And to be clear, this Demon Duchess was not one that I had created from my mind.

It was the real deal – the true Demon Duchess, Shichimiya Satone – that stood before our eyes.

What was different from usual was her appearance – the scarf that she usually wears looked like a blazing crimson flame, defying the laws of physics as it fluttered in the air. It was like it was giant wings of fire.

Her outfit too had changed – instead of her school uniform, she was wearing a jet-black outfit that captivated the eyes of anyone who saw it. As it was a highly revealing outfit that showed a lot of skin, I wasn't sure where I was meant to look. It was extremely effective against me.

So this was the Demon Duchess' true form...!

Shichimiya had transformed herself completely. She's turned her delusions into reality. It seems that Shichimiya's already managed to completely grasp how the Daydream System worked.

As expected of Shichimiya. Of course the Demon Duchess would understand how it works... was what I would like to be able to say.

What on earth is going on! Even accounting for Shichimiya being Shichimiya, this still makes no sense at all!

Shichimiya was meant to be out of the loop about all this happening, wasn't she!?

"You seem confused as to why I'm here, Hero! I told you before, didn't I? When there's a Hero, there's a Demon Duchess. That connection of ours – it resulted in me developing a particular ability."

R e s o n a n c e B e l z e t h i a

"...You're talking about Demon Duchess × Hero, aren't you?"

"Yes, correct! And so, that is why. About you, Hero. I know everything."

As she muttered that in a deep voice, Shichimiya jumped down from atop the cross. From our view, it looked like she had made quite the leap to jump down to us. In reality, however, she probably did the same thing that I did and jumped off the stage.

She's really mastered this aspect of the Daydream System, hasn't she?

"Nyahaha. I am the Demon Duchess after all."

As she said that, Shichimiya walked forward until she was exactly halfway between me and Rikka.

She then turned her back to me and looked directly at Rikka.

"Sorry about all this. You see, Rikka-chan, if your powers don't return... In that case, it means that I may still have a chance★."

"...Sofia."

“Nyahahahaha☆.”

Although it was a slightly different from how it normally was, Shichimiya laughed in her usual way. She then turned to face me.

This time, I was the one she was facing off against.

The expression on her face – it was one of determination. She appeared even more composed and cool than usual. Cooler than anyone, and more gallant than anyone – the very person I idolised.

That was the Shichimiya who stood before me.

“...You too Hero. Sorry about all this.”

“W-why? Why do something like this –”

“Why, you ask? It’s because I’m me. Because Shichimiya Satone is the Demon Duchess –”

And this is what a Demon Duchess would do, muttered Shichimiya in a deep voice as she jumped towards me.

Freely manipulating her flame-like scarf, Shichimiya then attacked me from all sides.

This was the scarf’s all range attack³⁸!

“Nyahaha! This is my Demon Duchess Prudent Twin Wing Strike!”

I had no idea why Shichimiya was standing in my way. Regardless, I somehow managed to defend myself against her attack. Well, although I say defend myself, it was more just taking her attack head on.

This was essentially same situation as the last time the Demon Duchess and I fought...

If I were to name a difference, it would be that the Demon Duchess was not crying this time around.

“Moreover! Hero! Don’t think I’m going to let you hand that over to Rikka-chan so easily!” Shichimiya yelled.

That voice of hers just now, it was different from the deep and heavy one from earlier. It was the usual Shichimiya. The usual bright and cherry Shichimiya voice.

“Won’t let me hand over that – wait, what!? Shichimiya, you know about that too!?”

“Like. I. Said! I know everything about you, Hero!”

³⁸ [オールレンジ攻撃](#) (literally All Range Attack) is a term used in the Japanese fandom for the Gundam series to describe the attack method in which all of a mobile suit’s funnels/bits are used simultaneously to launch a saturation attack. The term itself only appears in episode 39 of the original Mobile Suit Gundam anime.

“Grr...!”

“Nyahaha! And I know this about you too! *Because you’re so kind* – no matter how much time passes, you’re going to remain on the defensive!!! But just being on the defensive – that won’t do you any good!!!”

She was right on every point. All I could do against Shichimiya’s relentless attacks was defend. And yet, if things continued like this, I wouldn’t be able to properly tell Rikka how I truly feel. To remain only on the defensive indeed did not do me any good.

However, attacking Shichimiya was...

“Nyahaha! *And that’s why you can’t cross that line!!!* Why not fight back, Hero? What’s the worst that could happen? In fact, come on ☆!”

“Is that phrase trending or something!?”

I’ve heard that phrase a few times over already.

Even so – when all is said and done, I couldn’t attack her.

It wasn’t even an option. Absolutely unthinkable. Not possible. It was the same to me as having an affair – I would rather die instead. To hurt Shichimiya, to hurt someone so precious to me, was just – no.

But, if you were to ask me what I would do to break out of this status quo – “I’ll figure something out”, or in other words, nothing, was my only plan!

And. In the exact moment I came to that realisation.

Shichimiya, who was showing no signs of easing off on her relentless assault – with her being completely focused on attacking me, her defences were down. Unusually for her, she was wide open.

That was when she exploited – no, rammed into – that opening.

“Raaaah-death!”

“Wha!?”

Round and round and round they went.

The two rolled away from me with the same amount of momentum as she had used ramming into Shichimiya.

Then, that adorable underclassman of mine – Dekomori Sanae – went on the attack against Shichimiya. Making full use of her small physique and her twin tails, she managed to capture Shichimiya the Demon Duchess.

After locking Shichimiya down, she then yelled at me.

“What are you doing-death!!! Don’t falter-death!!! Hurry and restore Master’s powers-death!!! That was what you promised-death!!!”

...She was right.

I did promise Dekomori that. Granted, I couldn't guarantee how things would play out. Even so, I needed to show Dekomori my sincerity. From the very beginning, Dekomori had been worried about Rikka and had done everything she could to try help her.

I looked towards Dekomori and nodded.

I too needed to show my resolve.

"Right. I did promise!!!"

With that, I started walking towards Rikka.

As I did, the exchange of blows between Dekomori and Shichimiya continued.

"...Tch. You'll be the Devilish Truth Stare's ally until the very end, won't you, Deko-chan."

"Hmph. Of course-death. That's what it means to be a servant-death! However-death! Dekomori has a lot of respect for Sofia-senpai too-death! What will happen next – you already know all about it! There was no point to you coming! And yet you've gone out of your way to come anyway! So that you may be defeated! To self-destruct! You knew Dekomori's attack was coming, and yet you didn't evade it! All of it, everything, you knew! Dekomori could never do what you're doing-death!"

"...Shut it already."

Such was the conversation that reached my ears.

Dekomori-san, your voice was way too loud.

...But I had similar thoughts too. I too had a feeling that her being here was because of something like that. Knowing Shichimiya, she must have sensed that something was up during club activities today. And although it meant that Hideri-senpai's thoughtfulness had gone to waste – Shichimiya had said it herself.

"Let me join in on the fun."

That was probably what had been more important for Shichimiya. Not that we had intended to leave Shichimiya out, of course. Regardless, this was what Shichimiya herself had decided.

Even if it meant *killing herself*, this was indeed the option that Shichimiya would choose.

Shichimiya – she must have come to spur me on. Those words of hers. And those words of hers. The meaning behind them all got through to me.

She truly was cool. My idol. I wanted to be a person who was as cool as her. To be someone who she could continue to call Hero.

For that to happen – for me to become that sort of person, I needed to play my part properly.

And now, as I stood in front of Rikka.

I had to tell her how I feel properly.

“Good job on your fight against Sofia. I was watching closely. As expected of you, Yuuta – you didn’t lose!”

“Huh? Ah, yeah. But I didn’t win either.”

I hadn’t expected Rikka to praise my performance just now, so it did take a bit of the wind out of my sails.

Still, the fact that she just watched was meaningful.

Normally, Rikka would have jumped in to help me – the fact that she didn’t implied that she too was waiting to hear what I had to say.

With that in mind, I got myself all fired up again. Okay, let’s do this.

“Rikka, there’s something that I need you need to hear.”

I stared right into Rikka’s eyes.

Her eyes were different from usual – both of her irises were black.

“Okay. I want to hear what you have to say too. I’m all ears.”

“I–”

It’s time for me to convey my feelings – no, time for me to pour my heart out to her.

Everything that I thought and felt. All of it, unfiltered.

Actually, now that I think about it.

Me sharing my raw thoughts and emotions with Rikka was something I rarely ever did.

“I love you, Rikka. I love you a lot. I love you more than everything else in the world. No matter what form you take, I’ll always love you.”

“Yes. ...Yeah.”

Rikka made several small nods as she listened to my feelings.

But I still had more to say – I still had more that I wanted her to hear.

“However –”

I hesitated a little. I couldn’t help but hesitate.

Given what may happen next, it was only natural that I was nervous. It felt like my next words were going to change everything. But even so, I needed to continue. I needed to convey this to her.

“At the end of the day – the Devilish Truth Stare is still the strongest. It was that ability of yours that completely captivated my heart. I – I love the Rikka who is the user of the Devilish Truth Stare. I love the Rikka who is the strongest.”

In other words, I love the usual Rikka the most.

That was what I told her.

“Yes. ...Yeah.”

“That’s why, Rikka – I would like for you to return to how you were before.”

Everything. Candidly.

I think I managed to convey it.

My self-centred selfish thoughts. And while it may have been just me pushing my selfish thoughts onto her – this was the first time that I told her my selfish thoughts.

I believe that from now on, it was important that I am able to convey these sorts of thoughts properly to her.

Because I want for our relationship to grow even more intimate.

And so, I took that out from my pocket.

The thing that Hideri-senpai was referring to earlier when discussing male high school students suddenly wanting to start a part-time job – I took that out.

I had originally planned on giving it to her on her birthday, so giving it to her now was well in advance of what I had planned.

Still, giving it now – it felt like the perfect timing. And although doing it in front of everyone was a bit embarrassing – no, it may actually be an honour.

I had always planned on doing this someday. It just so happened that that day was today.

And because it was thanks to everyone that I was able to share with her my honest feelings, it only made sense that they were here to see me do this.

Showing Rikka what I had in my hand, I,

“This is... an *engagement ring*. And although it’s only something like this for now... it is the greatest proof of our contract that I can give you. With this proof of our contract – come back, Devilish Truth Stare!!! And then, once your powers return – no, even if they don’t return. Will you marry me, Rikka?”

proposed to her.

I could hear whistling flying in from the bleachers.

...Seems Hideri-senpai and Kumin-senpai were enjoying themselves.

As for Rikka – she was a blubbering mess.

The tears wouldn't stop pouring down her face.

I didn't know what the meaning behind her tears were. Until I hear what her thoughts were, there was no way for me to know. I could feel my heart beating faster and faster.

Rikka's answer was –

“...Ehehe. Thank you, Yuuta. Yes, I would love to marry you.”

After saying those words, Rikka put the ring that I gave her onto her ring finger of her left hand.

Rikka's expression – even with tears pouring down them, she had the most radiant smile on her face.

It was a smile much, much brighter than when I had first confessed to her – it was that dazzling of a smile. A smile overflowing with happiness.

I'm sure I was feeling the same too. I must have had the same expression on my face too.

“Right, thank you for accepting my feelings –”

And the accompanying ring and proposal as well.

Just as the two of us had started to get lost in our own little world, interjections flew in from the bleachers.

“Yuu-chan! We don't know if her powers have come back yet! Now's the time to do that! *We already showed you what to do once before, didn't we?*”

“Yeah, that! That! Whee wheww!”

...Those two were really having the time of their lives, weren't they.

Well, whatever.

Since they were in charge of holding the machines, they weren't able to see what was going on inside. Still, if I think of it as my two upperclassmen giving me their blessings, their interjections didn't bother me at all. In fact, it made me feel happy.

Besides – it was my duty as the underclassman to *follow my upperclassman's example*.

I took another step towards Rikka and whispered the following in her ear.

“With this, you'll regain your powers.”

I then kissed her.

A kiss to seal my vows. And on top of that, a kiss to wake up the princess. A special kiss – only for Rikka.

“Urgh!?”

“Dekodeko!?”

I felt like I heard a few odd screams before hearing squealing from the bleachers.

Paying no attention to what was happening in the background, I kissed Rikka for another 10 seconds before slowly pulling away.

Then, as if it were planned, and as if it was my intention the entire time – with miraculous timing, the world changed again. The sacred church glittered with light as it changed back to the gymnasium.

It was as if a spell had been broken.

It gave off a “things have been set up to be just perfect for you” sort of vibe.

I opened my mouth.

“It’s been about 5 minutes. But the things that have happened have not been a dream – all of it has been real, Rikka.”

“Ehehe, right. D'accord – that is to say, understood.”

Replied Rikka.

In her usual tone.

And, like usual – with a smile on her face.

“...Nyahahahaha. Oh my, it seems that I’ve been defeated. Congratulations are in order, aren’t they?”

Shichimiya, who had somehow managed to free herself from Dekomori’s restraints, spoke those lines as she slowly got back on her feet.

The Demon Duchess’ revival.

I guess you could say that this was her shifting into her second form.

“Nyahahahaha, looks like it’s *two red eyes* this time. So, Devilish Truth Stare. Has your powers returned?”

“...Yeah.”

In response to Shichimiya point it out, Rikka wiped the tears that had gathered in her eyes away.

Her eyes were definitely red. Shichimiya’s remark – I’m guessing it was her way of stirring Rikka up. Or at least that’s how it sounded like to me. It seemed that Rikka took it that way too.

“Yeah! My powers – they have made a complete comeback! And because everyone had lent me their strength... when both eyes glow red, it’s the Final Devilish Truth Stare!!!”

Rikka spread her arms out wide as she said that.

The Daydream System had long since shut down. There was no way for something that was out of this world to have materialised.

And yet – to me, it looked like there were giant jet-black wings sprouting from Rikka’s back.

Perhaps this was in response to Shichimiya’s giant wings of fire from earlier.

“This is the Final Devilish Truth Stare!?”

“Here it comes-death!!! By it returning, it has powered up-death!? As expected from Dekomori’s master-death!!!”

“Nyahaha☆. Well, now that your powers are back – how about I put them to the test ☆?”

Lowering her body into a fighting stance, Shichimiya then flicked her wrists at Rikka rapidly as if saying, “Come whenever you’re ready☆.”

To that taunt – Rikka accepted the challenge.

“Sofia, you don't understand the Final Devilish Truth Stare’s power. Yuuta, Arc-san, Siesta-senpai, Dekomori – and even you, Sofia. It carries everyone’s combined power!!!”

“M-master~! Dekomori will fight too-death!!!”

“Sorry for worrying you, Dekomori. Everything’s alright now. As the wielder of the Eye, no, of the Devilish Truth Stare, for me to rule over the jet-black world – in accordance with our blood pact, let my servant and I be swallowed together by the darkness!”

“Oh! Спасибо! That is to say, thank you so very much-death! Let us defeat that self-destructing Demon Duchess together-death!!!”

The two of them confronted Shichimiya head on.

Or more accurately, the two of them split off in a pincer movement and attacked Shichimiya from both sides.

It seems that it’s always the Demon Duchess who needs to deal with a large number of opponents at once.

“Nyahahahaha☆. Call me the self-destructing Demon Duchess, a playground slide Demon Duchess, or whatever else you like!!! I’m still the Demon Duchess!!! I will continue to be the solitary Demon Duchess for the rest of my life☆! Nyahaha☆! I have not even a shred of regret in the life I have lived, nyahaha☆!”

“What you’re doing isn’t being a Demon Duchess-death!!! You’re simply just giving up on yourself-death!!! You need to be a much tougher girl than that-death!!!”

The usual shenanigans began.

It was the usual back-and-forth scene. The usual everyday routine.

In the end, I think I do like our everyday lives being like this a lot more.

Hideri-senpai and Kumin-senpai were yelling “Go! Right there!” from the bleachers. Dekomori was at Rikka’s side, declaring, “It is a servant’s duty to protect their master!” Shichimiya and Rikka were off in their own world fighting a grand battle even without use of any systems. It was that sort of usual, yet special everyday routine.

The thing that Hideri-senpai always says – I feel like I kind of get it now.

Our club activity is *us doing something special* – this was what she meant.

Or so I think.

As I was thinking all that, Rikka took refuge behind me. It seemed that the power of the Demon Duchess who had become the embodiment of rage was something that even the Devilish Truth Stare could not easily defeat.

“Super Dark Flame Master’s power is insurmountable. Be my shield for a bit, Yuuta.”

“The Super Dark Flame Master is a hero, yet I’m to play the role of a tank instead... Although the role distribution makes me sad, I’ll make sure that you’re protected, Rikka!!!”

It really was the usual Rikka.

The Rikka that would assign powers to me of her own accord before hiding meekly behind me.

Dekomori-san was struggling frenetically against the Demon Duchess, yet here she was hiding leisurely behind my back.

God, she was so cute – right on the cusp of having my usual emotions take over, I remembered that there was still something that I hadn’t asked Rikka yet.

I had to know the reason behind that happening.

And so, I whispered to Rikka in a voice that only she could hear.

“Hey Rikka, why did the Devilish Truth Stare fall into slumber?”

The crux of the problem.

The main point at hand.

The cause of her losing her powers was still a big unknown.

“That’s...” Rikka stammered. She soon continued. “...Because I also love you.”

More and more question marks started to appear in my mind.

Huh? Because she loves me? What does that even mean? That because you love me, it was necessary to seal the Devilish Truth Stare? When have I ever said anything like that? I've never said that I prefer girls who don't have any abilities or anything along those lines.

"Umm... in other words, I'm the reason why your powers disappeared?"

"Yes – and that is because, the esteemed lady, she said that if my powers disappeared... err... I can't say any more than that. Please don't ask."

"...The esteemed lady."

Ah, now everything makes sense.

The esteemed lady – right.

Looks like I'll need to have a little talk with her.

"But, everything's alright now. The Devilish Truth Stare will never fall asleep ever again. Because you've already offered me the greatest contract that could be offered. The thing that I wanted the most."

Well, now that my magic power's recovered, I'm off to do battle against the Demon Duchess – so Rikka said as she ran off.

Rikka's eternally chuunibyou statements.

What she meant, naturally, was – or rather, come on!

Epilogue: Chuunibyou forever~

After the Rikka's Devilish Truth Stare Disappearance Incident (self-titled).

It had been some time since then. It was now lunch break, and so I texted *the esteemed lady* to come to an empty classroom that was at the end of the school building.

I waited alone in front of the blackboard.

Although the esteemed lady never replied to my text, it didn't take long before I heard footsteps approaching the classroom.

"Nyahaha, so what is it that you wanted to talk about, Yuu-chan?" she said playfully as she entered the classroom.

Why would she open in such a misleading way...!

She's also never called me Yuu-chan before.

"Come now, Yuuta-kun, the way you address someone can change if there's a reason for it. I hear that Mori-sama calls you by the cute sounding Yuutan. Maybe I should call you Yuutan too."

"Hmm... Well, I guess you do have a point. Still, I would have never guessed for you to be the final boss, Fuurin-chan."

Hearing me say that, Fuurin-chan grinned.

The only person that Rikka would refer to as the esteemed lady with her eyes downcast – the goddess, otherwise known as Fuurin-chan.

Rikka's best friend.

This incident's final boss.

The Black Committee she had mentioned earlier was in all likelihood referring to her meeting with Fuurin-chan.

"It's quite common in video games for God to be the final boss, isn't it?"

"That certainly is convincing, coming from a large lover of video games. That being said – it feels like you're speaking a little differently from usual. What happened to your usual lovely manner of speech?"

"Because the way I'm talking now is more final boss-ish?"

"That is true!"

When someone who usually speaks in a unique manner suddenly starts to talk normally, it does give them the vibe of being the final boss or the mastermind. In those cases, their unique manner of speech was all just an act.

Still, I liked how distinctive their speech made them. I wished that the final boss or the mastermind could keep their old manner of speech even after the reveal.

"Well, rather than the final boss, I'd say I'm more the hidden boss that you need to beat in order to see the true ending."

As she said those words, Fuurin-chan took a seat right in front of me.

Then, seemingly in amusement, she looked up towards me.

It looked like she was enjoying herself even more than usual.

"In other words, right now I'm en route to the true ending?"

"Who knows? Whether you are or not depends on you, doesn't it, Yuuta-kun?"

"Well, I guess you do have a point there. So, Fuurin-chan. What did you say to Rikka?"

I immediately went to the main topic at hand.

Although lunch break had only just started, I was still taking away Fuurin-chan's lunch break time.

"Hmm. Please don't get the wrong idea from this, I don't want to cause any misunderstandings – I only had the happiness of my cute and adorable Rikka-chan in mind. Provided she is happy, as long as I can see a cute Rikka-chan, that's enough for me. The Rikka-chan back then, she was just the cutest, wasn't she?"

"...That I can't deny. But I can't agree either."

Because if I were to fervently agree, it would mean that the words that I had spoken wishing for Rikka to return to how she was would become a lie.

Still, it goes without saying that I did think that version of Rikka was cute.

I mean, it was still Rikka after all – let's just leave things at that.

"Heh heh, there's no need for you to be that reserved. Just be honest. Regardless of what you say, it won't be changing anything, right?"

"Well... She was super cute!"

"Well said. As expected of member no. 2. Anyway, as the president of the Rikka-chan Fan Club, it's my duty to watch over her. Not only that..."

Pausing for a bit, she looked up at me. She then continued happily.

"I'm her best friend. Of course I'll know all about the cute worries of Rikka-chan that her boyfriend has no inkling of."

She spoke with such self-confidence to the point that it seemed that she really knew all about the worries Rikka had. Her smile was one of a strong person. She seriously was final boss-like.

"Ah, but it's not like I'm saying that being her boyfriend's a bad thing. Honestly, I'm intensely jealous of you. It's always the boyfriend who gets Rikka-chan to act and change, after all. Heh heh, but since you're rather cute yourself, I'll share with you what I told Rikka-chan. See, Rikka-chan had lots of worries. That must be why I ended up telling Rikka-chan a variety of different things?"

"...What were the things that Rikka was worried about?"

"Heh heh heh... It was about her first time."

"Her first time?"

Since I had absolutely no idea what she meant by that, I repeated what she had said back to her in a confused voice.

Was it something that only a best friend would understand?

"Rikka-chan had been trying to bring it up this entire time, hasn't she? *Just think back* – surely there's a few incidents that come to mind, right? Well, then again, maybe not? You are a bit of a late bloomer, both in terms of your looks and nature."

"H-huh? What are you on about?"

"Heh heh, Rikka-chan was so cute. 'I want my first time to be with Yuuta,' she said. Well, but I did sort of force that out of her. Ah, so cute so very cute! Just remembering it brings a smile to my face! At that time, Rikka-chan was so cute!"

"....."

"And so, this naughty big sister told her something. Something to the effect of, 'They say that a witch loses their magic powers when they abandon their chastity, right? Maybe that's why Yuuta-kun isn't trying to take your chastity away?' When she heard that, Rikka-chan had such a flustered expression on her face. It was so cute that I almost died!"

"That's a lot more than just being a naughty big sister!"

"It's not that a big of a deal. I simply wanted to see Rikka-chan being cute lots. To see all kinds of different cute Rikka-chans. Is that really so bad?"

"What you've said sounds like something that a hidden boss would say..."

"Ehehe. Yuuta-kun, because I love the you who loves Rikka-chan, I'll share this insight with you. Make sure that you *take the first step* properly. Being a boyfriend is more than just being kind."

"...I'll keep that in mind."

"It's not chuunibyou that you need to graduate from. Instead, it's—"

"Stop talking like a dirty old man!"

But setting that aside for now.

Honestly – it was pretty much what Shichimiya had said from the very start.

There's no such thing as "moving on". Only "evolution".

Rikka was trying to change – trying to transition onto the next stage.

I was the one who had stopped.

That was why I was the cause of it all.

That is why I too needed to properly move forward.

So that I could love Rikka properly.

"Anyway, does that mean that you haven't taken her first time yet? In that case, can I take it?"

Thus suddenly spoke Fuurin-chan.

Because it was so spontaneous yet natural, it threw me off.

"No no! You can't!"

I somehow managed to shut her down.

Fuurin-chan was seriously scary.

"Heh heh heh, well I wish you all the best. And, congratulations on your engagement. Invite me to the wedding ceremony, okay?"

"What... Ah, right. Thank you."

"Ahaha, you're super cute too, Yuuta-kun. Since Rikka-chan's my best friend, maybe I should apply to be your mistress."

"Rikka is the only one for me. No cheating. No mistresses."

"Is that so? Well, that's fine. Because I'm still Rikka-chan's *best and truest friend*! I'll continue to put all sorts of different things in her head. Ah, my fantasies about the cute Rikka-chan are running more and more wild!"

"Seriously, stop it!"

Honestly, this girl.

As usual, when it was just Fuurin-chan and I, we end up getting extremely excited talking about Rikka. Still, speak of the devil and he shall appear – as we were talking, Rikka had arrived at the empty classroom, seemingly looking for us.

Today's Rikka was the usual Rikka.

An eyepatch on, covering her golden eye.

Speaking not in a cutesy tone, but in her regular one.

Her powers at full throttle.

It was that Rikka who had a look of relief on her face.

“Ah, there you two are! It has been a while since I’ve had to use Devilish Truth Stare Search, but it doesn’t seem like it’s grown dull. I’m glad. Still, what are the two of you doing in a place like this?”

When Rikka asked that, Fuurin-chan looked in my direction for a moment. Grinning, she turned back to face Rikka before giving the following answer.

“Heh heh heh, just talking about lewd things.”

...It really was lewd!

It looks like I still can’t beat the hidden boss. There’s an overwhelming EXP gap. But that’s okay. It just means that I’ll have to keep giving it my all from this point on.

I’ll give it my all so that the hidden boss will acknowledge and accept me.

I won’t be able to reach the true ending otherwise.

Meanwhile, Rikka appeared confused by Fuurin-chan's answer, having tilted her head to the side. Despite that,

“Sure? But more importantly, here.”

Rikka extended both of her hands towards us.

“Activating the contract of the Devilish Truth Stare! The two of you must immediately prepare to have lunch with me!”

Fuurin-chan took Rikka’s left hand with a smile.

“Seriously, you are so cute, Rikka-chan.”

Yep.

To that I agree wholeheartedly.

I took Rikka’s right hand.

“Right, the Devilish Truth Stare is the strongest after all!”

Rikka reacted strongly to my words.

With a massive smile on her face –

“Yep! The Devilish Truth Stare is the strongest!”

Afterword

Nice to meet you here-death! This is Dekomori Sanae-death. This is the afterword, or rather the post commentary-death. Think of it like the character commentary that's found on the bonus disc-death. Yay! Dekomori will do her best-death!!!

Many of you may be thinking that it would be more appropriate for Master to be here instead-death. However, as her servant, it is only natural that Dekomori takes on Master's work-death! Master shouldn't be troubled over something like this-death! You then may think that this should be the Dark Flame Master's job-death. However, if the Dark Flame Master was here, all he would be saying is "Rikka's cute" or things along those lines, so he would be useless (and gross)-death. If it was Sofia-senpai, she would be too diligent breaking every single detail down, so she would be no good either (bringing the mood down)-death. Siesta-senpai would just sleep (she's asleep right now)-death, and it goes without saying why Rainbow-senpai isn't an option (dangerous)-death. It also was out of the question for that perverted angel cosplay woman who appeared to be Master's acquaintance Dekomori met the other day to do this-death!

And so, Dekomori was the only option-death!

Still, that perverted angel cosplay woman, why did she speak as if she knew about the Mabinogion, a tome that only Dekomori should know about-death.... Next time, Dekomori should use the photos she had secretly taken (the Dark Flame Master can be useful on occasion-death) of her perverted cosplay the other day to force a confession out of her-death.

In any case, Master's powers have returned without incident – or rather, from what Master had told Dekomori later on-death, Master had sealed off her powers herself in order to deceive Dekomori and the others-death. As expected of Master-death...! Her acting skills easily fooled Dekomori and the others! Still, even with that being the case, Dekomori wished that Master could have let Dekomori know-death.

It really broke Dekomori when Master referred to Dekomori as "Sanae-chan"-death... Well, to be fair, hearing something like that would make anybody cry-death. Dekomori's sure that Master too would cry if Dark Flame Master started referring to Master as "Takanashi-san" out of nowhere-death. Actually, that was a bad analogy-death. It's more like if Dekomori suddenly started referring to Master as "Rikka-senpai" – Master would cry without a doubt-death! Dekomori would never do that sort of thing-death!

Well, Master did apologise profusely to Dekomori afterwards, so let's just stop here with all the talk about Dekomori crying...

How did everyone enjoy the tale of friendship between Master and Dekomori-death? Although it may have seemed to be a story where Dark Flame Master flirted with Master-death, gehehe... To be frank, it was all thanks to Dekomori's power!!!

That is to say, in other words, that it would be no exaggeration to say that Dekomori had already been getting lovey-dovey and flirting with Master. Gehehe, see that, Dark Flame Master? Witness Dekomori's ingenuity!

If Dekomori was to have any regrets, it would be that Dekomori never had the chance to tell the tale of how Master and Dekomori had first met... That great summer adventure! Master's magnificent kindness! There are countless things for Dekomori to talk about-death, but Dekomori will keep it a secret for now-death.

As per the Mabinogion-death: "Keep secrets. The secrets will strengthen you."

Now then, it is time to bid farewell-death. Although Dekomori is sad to part ways, Dekomori is truly grateful to everyone who has supported Master, Dekomori, and the rest of us up until now-death!

On one last note - to borrow from Sofia-senpai's sole unique famous line-death: "We'll always be in this world, so we can never truly separate. That's the rule of this world. It's a Heavenly Connection!"

Dekomori hopes that we'll meet again someday-death!

Blurb

The Devilish Truth Stare has disappeared – !? When Yuuta went to pick Rikka up in the morning as per usual – Rikka’s golden eye was not there.

“When I got up this morning, the Devilish Truth Stare had disappeared...”

The tone and mannerism of the Rikka who said that was that of a “normal girl”. Making every effort to restore the chuunibyou-less Rikka back to her former self, Yuuta enlists the aid of Shichimiya and the members of the Eccentric Drama Club. Examining the situation seriously together, they decided to go with the strategy of stimulating that chuuni-heart of hers to return Rikka back to her former self, but with “Will Not Feel at Ease Unless Special” Amaniji Hideri heading the operation, everyone did as they pleased... Will Rikka’s chuunibyou ever come back?

And what was the cause of Rikka becoming normal?

Finally, Yuuta and Rikka’s love reaches its climax!